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Pope Francis greeted by protests in Ireland, following child sex scandals, abortion rights fight

The pontiff finds an Ireland marked by social change, less deference to Catholic Church

By Casey Quinlan

Think Progress (26.08.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2okkhD0> - Pope Francis is in Ireland this weekend for the first papal visit since Pope John Paul II's in 1979. As the Pontiff might quickly have gleaned from the protests joined by thousands of demonstrators, things have changed since then with Ireland's Catholic faithful.

For one thing, there is less far deference to officials in the Church hierarchy, after a determined fight by women in Ireland for reproductive rights. And the Catholic Church in Ireland and abroad has been rocked by multiple sexual abuse scandals, including a recent report involving over 1,000 victims in Pennsylvania.

According to the Independent, some people have refused to attend events presided over by Pope Francis in silent protest and "disavowal" of the church's "stranglehold" on culture and government in Ireland.

Other protesters gathered at Dublin Castle after Pope Francis' arrival on Saturday to demonstrate against child sex abuse in the Catholic Church. Margaret McGuckin, herself a survivor of sexual violence, said she wanted the church to know survivors were still making their voices heard.

"The Pope now needs to stand up to the plate and do something for the survivors. We need redress, we need the church held to account," McGuckin told the Independent.

The share of young people who identify as Catholics is now much lower than in previous generations. In 2015, Ireland voted to legalize same-sex marriage. Its Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who is gay, welcomed Pope Francis to the country on Saturday.

Earlier this year, Ireland voted overwhelmingly to repeal its near-total ban on abortion, with two in three Irish voters approving to legalize it. A 1990s case of a girl who had been raped and sought an abortion outside of the country, and who was only allowed access to the procedure after she became suicidal, started a national discussion about abortion. In 2012, a woman died of a cardiac arrest after doctors refused to perform an abortion, even though physicians knew she expected a miscarriage — a horrifying incident which gained national attention.

Meanwhile, just this month, a Pennsylvania grand jury report detailed abuse that spanned several decades and accused more than 300 priests of sexually abusing children across six Roman Catholic dioceses.

There were reportedly more than 1,000 victims, and those are just the victims who were willing to come forward. Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, the head of Pope Francis' Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, canceled his visit to Dublin so that he could look into investigations into alleged sexual misconduct in Boston that were separate from the grand jury report.

Questions swirl around what Pope Francis himself knows about sexual abuse within the church. A letter from Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò alleges that he told Pope Francis about sexual abuse allegations against former D.C. archbishop Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and that the Pope did nothing.

"In this extremely dramatic moment for the universal Church, he must acknowledge his mistakes and, in keeping with the proclaimed principle of zero tolerance, Pope Francis must be the first to set a good example to Cardinals and Bishops who covered up McCarrick's abuses and resign along with all of them," Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò wrote.

In a huge demonstration on Sunday, people protested the Pope's visit at the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin.

Other protests involved people tying baby shoes with black mourning ribbon to the railings of former Magdalene laundries, according to Dublin Live. These church-run institutions were for "fallen women" and they experienced abuse and ill treatment in these laundries. In the 1990s, a mass grave was discovered on the grounds of one of the laundries.

Another group called We Are Church also held a protest on Dublin's Ha'penny Bridge — tying blue ribbons and rainbow flags to the bridge — and said the church must accept female priests, welcome LGBTQ members, and truly confront its sexual abuse problem.

Pope Francis acknowledged abuse allegations and said to lawmakers and diplomats in Dublin on Saturday, "I cannot fail to acknowledge the grave scandal caused in Ireland by the abuse of young people by members of the church charged with responsibility for their protection and education."

But survivors of sexual abuse and other critics of the church's handling of sexual abuse have said his remarks were not enough and that he didn't provide any indication of what steps the church would take on the issue. According to the Washington Post, Mark Vincent Healy, an Irish victim of church sexual abuse, the pope's speech was "empty."

"I was with a group of survivors, and they were all upset with the statements as being ineffectual," Healy told the Post.

Irish parliament could decide on abortion referendum by end-2017

Reuters (25.10.2016) - <http://reut.rs/2eFtksd> - Ireland's parliament could be in a position to decide on whether to hold a referendum to repeal restrictive abortion laws by

the end of next year if a citizens' assembly recommends a vote should be held to widen access.

Regulations in the once stridently Catholic Ireland are among the strictest in the world and Prime Minister Enda Kenny this month called together 99 members of the public to advise government on the politically-divisive issue.

The assembly has been asked to deliver its report in the first half of 2017 and the government said on Tuesday that a parliamentary committee due to be set up to respond would be convened immediately and have six months to do so.

If a referendum is recommended, a vote would then be needed in parliament to set one up, potentially paving the way for a plebiscite in 2018.

Activists who marched in their thousands last month to seek the abolition of the eighth amendment of the constitution, which enshrines an equal right to life of the mother and her unborn child, have pressured the government not to delay a decision.

Abortion has long been a controversial topic in Ireland where a complete ban was only lifted in 2013 when terminations were allowed if a mother's life is in danger. Anti-abortion supporters demand no further changes to safeguard all life.

The timetable set out by the government on Tuesday was in response to opposition attempts to provide for a referendum immediately that threatened a split among the minority coalition government.

Women must play bigger role in church, Synod hears

Limerick Diocesan Synod hears call for lay-led liturgies without priests on weekdays

The Ireland Times (10.04.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1qHwwIP> - Women need to play a much more important role in the church, the first Synod in Ireland in 50 years has been told.

Some 400 delegates spent three days at the Limerick Diocesan Synod where they voted on 100 proposals to help map out the future of the church and how it serves the local community in a time of falling vocations.

A motion to establish a working group to explore and scope out how and where women can play a leadership role in the governance of the church received the highest number of priority votes at the Synod.

A proposal to develop and support lay-led liturgies and the celebration of sacraments was supported by more than 90 per cent of delegates.

Lay-led liturgies

Speaking at the Synod Fr Eugene Duffy, a lecturer in theology and religious studies at Mary Immaculate College, recommended that occasional lay-led liturgies without priests should be introduced on weekdays as a way of preparing for the reality of priests not being available to every parish in the years ahead.

"If we can get used to having lay-led liturgy on week days first then people will begin to appreciate it, understand it, grow in their own acceptance of it and see the value of it," he said.

"In the absence of a priest that's what they will have to do on a Sunday. We have to start by doing it on a week day and then people become familiar with it. The foundational thing that people have to do is to gather on a Sunday to worship, however we do it.

Fr Duffy also said that the Catholic Church can learn from the Church of Ireland in this regard.

"The Church of Ireland has readers who look after the liturgy on a Sunday if an ordained minister cannot be present. We are going to have to get used to this situation and have no option to prepare for it. Otherwise there is going to be a trauma some Sunday.

The role of women in the church was also discussed as part of the universal themes which could not be voted on but were discussed on the final day of the Synod.

Vincent Hanley, a delegate from Knockaderry/Clouncagh, Co Limerick, said the issue of women priests was a popular theme during the three-year listening process which took place before the Synod.

"Up to now we have been very pragmatic in our discussions but there are elephants in the room and especially the situation around women priests. This issue came up again and again in our listening process, in the questionnaires and our assemblies," said Mr Hanley.

Marian Wallace, a delegate from Ardpatrick, Co Limerick, said women, in particular mothers, were tired of "religious apartheid".

"Mothers are the backbone of the church, we teach our children we bring them to church but we are tired of inequality we are tired of religious apartheid," she said.