

Pope Francis welcomed to Ireland with sea of Pride flags

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Pope Francis has touched down in Ireland to meet the masses on his historical visit.

LGBT campaigners in Dublin have made sure the Pope is met with a sea of Pride flags.

Hundreds of thousands of people will welcome Francis during his whistle-stop tour of the capital city and County Mayo over the weekend.

Blue ribbons were tied on the Ha'penny Bridge over the River Liffey in Dublin city centre in a symbol of solidarity with victims and survivors of clerical wrongdoing, which has rocked the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The distinctive pedestrian span was also awash with rainbow flags and purple umbrellas supporting the ordination of female priests.

The demonstration was styled as a welcome to the pontiff rather than a protest.

Those taking part held placards with the message: 'Justice for abused women' and decried 'vile' language used about members of the LGBT community by some in the Catholic Church.

Tourists in this popular and busy part of the city centre gathered to watch.

The gathering happened just a couple of minutes walk from Dublin Castle where the Pope meets Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar on Saturday afternoon.

Among those present were Maria Angalika Fromm (We are Church Germany), 67, from near Frankfurt in Germany, who said she had worked for 50 years for a changed church and urged Pope Francis to persist with his reforms.

She added: 'He needs to break down the patriarchal structures and be open to women's ordination without celibacy and caring for all people including gay and lesbian.

'He has to go on and not be stopped by the old conservative men in the Vatican.'

Eddie McGuinness, 49, an organiser of the annual Gay Pride festival in Dublin, said he wanted the church to welcome LGBTQ people.

'The Pope asked for forgiveness but let's show forgiveness and embrace the diversity of all families.'

He added: 'It is about love, so why not embrace the teachings of Christ?'

'Men cannot do this on their own, they need women behind them and they need the LGBTQ community behind them as well and that is what we need to embrace.'

The Pontiff will witness a country that has undergone seismic social changes in the four decades since the last papal visit in 1979, when John Paul II was lauded by a nation shaped by its relationship with an all-powerful Catholic Church.

During his visit, some 1.25 million people turned out for his inaugural Mass in Phoenix Park, a third of the country's population and the largest gathering in Irish history at the time.

Around 100,000 people are expected to line the streets of Dublin city centre on Saturday afternoon as the Pope passes through in his famous Pope Mobile.

In the evening he will join 80,000 pilgrims at a musical festival in the landmark Croke Park Gaelic Athletic

Association stadium.

On Sunday the Pope will fly west to Co Mayo where he will follow in the footsteps of John Paul II and take part in a religious service at a Holy shrine in Knock.

He will then return to Dublin for the closing centrepiece of the World Meetings of Families event – an outdoor Mass in front of an expected congregation of half a million people.

The Rainbow Choir is made up of LGBT singers and is protesting the event against the exclusion of gay people and their families.

Among its supporters are Maria Angalika Fromm, from Germany, who has worked for 50 years for a changed church and said the Pope needed to persist with reforms.

She said: 'He needs to break down the patriarchal structures and be open to women's ordination without celibacy and caring for all people including gay and lesbian.

'He has to go on and not be stopped by the old conservative men in the Vatican.'

While the Pope will receive a warm reception from the thousands of pilgrims who have travelled to be part of the occasion, he will also be met by protesters angry at how the church dealt with multiple clerical sex abuse scandals that have damaged trust in the religious institution and seriously weakened its influence on Irish society.

Irish abuse victims and their supporters were expected to hold a solidarity rally on Sunday in Dublin, at the same time Francis is celebrating his final Mass to close out the family conference.

Separately, survivors of Ireland's 'mother and baby homes' – where children were exiled for the shame of having been born to unwed mothers – are holding their own demonstration Sunday.

The location is Tuam, site of a mass grave of hundreds of babies who died over the years at a church-run home.

Francis will be nearby, visiting the Marian shrine at Knock, but has no plans to visit the grave site.

The Catholic institution has been under fire across the globe for its systemic failures to protect children from priestly rapists or punish bishops who hid the crimes and Francis is expected to meet with victims during his 36-hour visit to Dublin.

The Vatican has said he will have 'many opportunities' to speak out about abuse, but this is not likely calm the outrage among rank-and-file Catholics in Ireland and abroad following new revelations of sexual misconduct and cover-up in the U.S., an ongoing crisis in Chile and prosecutions of top clerics in Australia and France.

Ireland has had one of the worst records of abuse in the world, crimes that were revealed to its 4.8 million deeply Catholic people over the past decade by a series of government-mandated inquiries.

They revealed thousands of children raped and molested by priests and physically abused in church-run schools, and bishops who covered up the crimes.

After the Irish church atoned for its past and enacted tough new norms to fight abuse, it had been looking to the first visit by a pope in 40 years to show a different, more caring church that understands the problems of ordinary Catholic families today.

But in a country where Catholic bishops held such sway that they advised the drafters of the republic's constitution in the 1930s, voters have begun to turn their backs on traditional Catholic teachings and have overturned a constitutional ban on abortion and legalised divorce, homosexuality, contraception and same-sex marriage.

Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who will welcome Francis at Dublin Castle on Saturday, is openly gay.

<https://metro.co.uk/2018/08/25/pope-francis-welcomed-to-ireland-with-sea-of-pride-flags-7881040/?ito=article.amp.share.top.facebook>

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