

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ULSTER

Presbytery of Ulster

20th September 1999.

Mr. Bertie Ahern,
The Prime Minister,
Irish Republic,
Leinster House,
DUBLIN.

RECEIVED 21 SEP 1999

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the General Presbytery of Ulster, I wish to inform you of our deep concern about recent attacks mounted on Free Presbyterian properties in your Country.

On 4th July 1999 an attempt was made to burn down our church building at Corragarry, Co. Monaghan. Damage amounting to almost £100,000 (One hundred thousand pounds sterling) was done, the building being set alight at both ends.
The reasons given by the Garda to me personally, that this was an act of drunken vandals and that there was no religious motivation, I simply do not accept.

Our Tullyvallen congregation has just completed the purchase of the Orange Hall in Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan. Extensive building operations are currently being carried out to this Hall to make it suitable as a Free Presbyterian Church building. Last Friday night/Saturday morning, 17th/18th September, this building was also attacked, the newly installed windows smashed and other damage done.

In view of these attacks the Presbytery requests an urgent meeting with you to put this very serious affair before you. The deputation we wish you to receive would include the minister of the Corrygarry and Tullyvallen congregations together with representatives of the same. I, as Moderator, would lead the deputation.

I trust this meeting can be arranged as quickly as possible.

Yours faithfully,

Ian Paisley

MODERATOR ~ Dr Ian RK Paisley MP MEP, 17 Cyprus Avenue, Belfast BT5 5NT

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Briefing Note for An Taoiseach

Background

Over the past five years there have been a number of incidents of criminal damage to churches and halls associated with non-Catholic churches in the area of the Cavan/ Monaghan Garda Division. These incidents include a tyre being set alight at a church front door, a window being broken, a break-in where there no criminal damage was caused or property stolen, two (2) petrol bombs were thrown in another instance. An amateurish attempt at arson was involved in a number of these incidents.

Recent Incidents

The most serious recent incident occurred on 4 July, 1999 when a church building, an adjoining portacabin and a tractor were set alight at Coragarry Free Presbyterian Church, Drum, Co. Monaghan. A malicious injury claim for £100,000 has been lodged with Monaghan County Council on the basis that this was a sectarian attack.

A full investigation was launched by the Gardaí following the fire and two (2) persons who were seen close to the scene were arrested on 4 August, 1999. They were subsequently released without charge as the Gardaí were satisfied that they had no involvement in the matter - they just happened to be passing on a motor cycle at the time. Investigations are continuing and other arrests are likely.

The second incident occurred on 19 September 1999 when Gardaí at Castleblaney were advised that windows at Annyart Protestant Hall (owned by the Free Presbyterian Church) were damaged by bricks. The Gardaí investigated: investigations are continuing but there have been no developments to date. The extent of the damage is estimated at about £500. While the building has been owned by the Free Presbyterian Church for several years it was rarely, if ever, used. It was being refurbished at the time of the attack.

Local investigators have so far failed to establish the identity of the culprits in either of the above mentioned incidents. There is no specific evidence at this stage indicating a subversive or other motive. The Gardaí have indicated in radio and television interviews that the damage caused on 19 September was the work of local vandals.

Contact with Dr Paisley

Dr Paisley visited the scene of the fire on 16 July, 1999. He was accompanied by his son Ian and the Rev. Gordon Deane. While there they spoke with local Gardaí

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and during the conversation the fire and criminal damage, as well as the matter of compensation, were discussed. Dr Paisley is aware that local Garda officers have indicated that the damage at Corgarry Free Presbyterian Church (on 19/9/99) was the work of local vandals. He may well challenge this view. The Gardaí also met with the Rev Deane on 5 July, 7 July and 13 August.

Current Garda arrangements

Arrangements are in place that Garda mobile patrols pay attention to all non-Catholic church premises. All Gardaí on outdoor duty are also aware of the damage that has been caused and the possibility of a recurrence and are briefed accordingly.

An uncoded message to the Irish News on 28/9/99 claimed that the *Catholic Reaction Force* was responsible for the burning of Protestant churches in the Republic. No further information is available as yet.

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