

PE1737/B

Catholic Parliamentary Office of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland submission of 13 October 2019

According to the Scottish Government report 'Religiously Aggravated Offending in Scotland 2017-2018' Roman Catholicism was the subject of the offensive conduct of 50% of charges (319 out of a total of 662 charges). In 2016-17 the figure was 57% and Roman Catholicism has been the target of at least 50% of religiously aggravated offending since at least 2012-13.

These figures are despite Roman Catholicism being a minority religion in Scotland, with only 16% of the Scottish population identifying as Roman Catholic. This suggests that Roman Catholicism and/or those who identify as Roman Catholic are disproportionately targeted in terms of religiously aggravated offending.

In 2018 there were four assaults on priests in Scotland and there have been a number of attacks on churches in recent years, including the desecration of St Patrick's Catholic Church in Coatbridge and serious damage wrought by vandals in St Simon's Catholic Church in Glasgow.

These are just statistics and examples relating to attacks on Roman Catholics and the Roman Catholic faith. Other Christian denominations and faith groups have been the target of similar attacks.

The creation of a scheme similar to that which operates in England and Wales could provide valuable funding to assist local churches and faith communities to make their premises more secure and to protect them from hate crime. People should be able to freely and safely attend places of worship without the threat of intimidation, abuse or violence, and places of worship should be protected, as far as is reasonably possible, from acts of vandalism. Additional protective and security measures at places of worship would support this endeavour. It would also support police and local communities in detecting and/or preventing criminal behaviour.