



## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Christians : **94.4%**
- Spiritists : **2.6%**
- Baha'is : **1.7%**
- Others : **1.3%**

73.000

750 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution<sup>[1]</sup> states that for the people of Dominica the founding principles of the country are the supremacy of God, faith in human rights and fundamental freedoms, the dignity of the human person, and the equal and inalienable rights with which all people are endowed by their Creator.

Dominica upholds the protection of every citizen's human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is subject to each person's respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest. Article 1 of the constitution states that this includes, *inter alia*, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, without distinction of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex.

Conscientious objection to military service is recognised in Article 4 of the constitution.

Article 9 of the constitution declares that no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of their freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, manifest it and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, alone or with others, in public or in private. Except with their own consent (or that of their guardian in case of minors under 18 years of age), no person attending a place of education or detained in prison or serving in the Armed Forces shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part or attend any religious ceremony that is not of their own religion.

Article 9 also declares that every religious community has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, places of education and shall not be hindered or prevented from providing education and religious instruction to its members, irrespective of whether they receive government subsidies. No person shall be required to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or beliefs.

Religious organisations can be recognised as non-profit entities provided they request registration from the Ministry of Justice.<sup>[2]</sup> Such requests must be signed by five directors of the religious group and give the name and place where religious services will be celebrated. Places of worship are also subject to registration and can only be used for religious purposes. <sup>[3]</sup>

Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost Monday and Christmas are national holidays.<sup>[4]</sup>

Dominica has a national prayer.<sup>[5]</sup>

## | Incidents

In mid-2016, the Pointe Michel Catholic Church, located in the town of the same name, was damaged by arson. The site, which is dedicated to Our Lady of La Salette, is a National Shrine.<sup>[6]</sup>

In August 2016, a Muslim family, on their way home from a trip to Santa Lucia, was offended by a Dominican official. The latter forced the wife to lift her hijab, to check her identity. When the family asked that a female officer make the identification, they were told none was available. The husband said: “[The Muslim official] wanted to ensure he himself saw her . . . she raised the veil and he wants to see more, wants her to raise it more.”<sup>[7]</sup> The head of the Muslim community noted that that this was not the first time Muslims faced this kind of situation at customs but there were concerns that nobody should be exempt from full and comprehensive security checks.

In early 2017, the Dominican Association of Evangelical Churches protested against acts of vandalism and violence that took place during a protest calling for the resignation of the country’s Prime Minister and cabinet.<sup>8</sup>

## | Prospects for freedom of religion

Unlike the previous period (2014-2016), there were reports of intolerance on the part of agents of the state, and attacks against places of worship. This would suggest a decline regarding freedom of religion but it is not sufficient to be categorised as a trend.

## | Endnotes / Sources

[1] Articles cited are from Dominica’s Constitution of 1978 with Amendments through 2014, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Dominica_2014.pdf?lang=en), [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Dominica\\_2014.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Dominica_2014.pdf?lang=en), (accessed 5th March 2018).

[2] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, ‘Dominica’, International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 22nd March 2018).

[3] ‘Registry Division’, Justice, Immigration and National Security, Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, <http://justice.gov.dm/divisions/registry-division>, (accessed 5th March 2018).

[4] 'National Prayer', Web Portal, Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, <http://www.dominica.gov.dm/about-dominica/public-holidays>, (accessed 5th March 2018).

[5] 'Public Holidays', Web Portal, Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, <http://www.dominica.gov.dm/about-dominica/national-symbols/national-prayer>, (accessed 5th March 2018).

[6] 'Suspected arson at Pointe Michel Catholic church', Dominica News Online, 22nd July 2016, <http://dominicanewsonline.com/news/homepage/news/accidents-tragedy/suspected-arson-at-pointe-michel-catholic-church/>, (accessed 5 March 2018); 'Fire in Pointe Michel's National Shrine', The Sun, 23rd July 2016, <http://sundominica.com/articles/fire-in-pointe-michels-national-shrine-3625/>, (accessed 5th February 2018).

[7] 'Respect Religious Rights', The Sun, 31st August 2016, <http://sundominica.com/articles/respect-religious-rights-3775/>, (accessed 5 March 2018).

[8] 'Evangelical Churches condemn Roseau violence', Dominica News Online, 9th February 2017, <http://dominicanewsonline.com/news/homepage/news/general/evangelical-churches-condemn-roseau-violence/>, (accessed 5th March 2018).