Gabrielle Monaghan

IT'S Friday night in Temple Bar and Bill Drummond is dressed as a pirate, resplendent in knee-high black boots. The outfit seems fitting for the 63-year-old since he spent decades in the Sea Org, the Church of Scientology’s “elite” corps, which once operated from ships. Some of its members still wear naval-style uniforms.

Drummond, however, has described himself as “a pirate, about to sink the ship of Scientology.” The former founder member of the religion is attending a two-day conference in Filmbase in Dublin’s Temple Bar, where he will speak for the first time about his experiences within Scientology’s inner sanctum. Many attendees are wearing balaclavas, black scarves that cover most of their faces or the Guy Fawkes masks associated with the Anonymous activist collective.

Drummond is one of several defectors from the church who travelled from around the world to Dublin this weekend to attend the conference, which is entitled Scientology: Enough is Enough.

The organiser is Pete Griffiths, who once ran a Scientology mission in England and is now embroiled in a legal battle with the church’s Dublin office. The aim is to encourage more governments to investigate the secretive religion, to help former members to heal, and to reach out to existing members of a global movement endorsed by actor Tom Cruise.

The best-known speaker is John Sweeney, a former BBC correspondent who made Scientology and Me, a 2007 documentary about his ordeal, which included a photo of a smiling Griffiths wearing nothing but an Anonymous-like mask covering his genitals. Griffiths says the image was a joke in support of Prince Harry after he was photographed in the nude at a Las Vegas pool party.

Drummond’s costume also suggests a jovial nature. He joined the church in the 1960s because his mother was a leading Scientologist who knew L. Ron Hubbard, the science-fiction writer who created the movement in 1953 and wrote that mankind’s problems are the work of a despotic alien, Xenu, who fought an intergalactic war 75m years ago.

Drummond’s mother put him and his three siblings in a South African orphanage so he could earn enough money to pay for Scientology courses and work her way up its levels of enlightenment. When he was drafted for the South African army, his mother encouraged him to move to the UK, where he worked in the Sea Org. He first left the church in 1972 after a dispute. Drummond was drawn back into the church in 1981 after being “excommunicated.”

In all the years I was out of the church, I had trouble with drugs and I travelled the world,” he said.

Cruise is a high-profile supporter of the religion; left, Drummond is a former member of its “elite corps”

They will hurt me to stop me,” he said. “If they find out I’ve told you anything here, my family will be in danger and I will be in danger. My wife is terrified.”

On Friday night, the conference was shown Brainwashed, a film that depicted guest speaker Nancy Mani working in the Sea Org and later as a covert agent for Scientology’s investigative division. While pregnant, she claimed to have endured a system of religious remediation called the Rehabilitation Project Force, during which she was compelled to make amends by living in a cold, dimly-lit area of an underground garage.

Ger Ryan, from the church’s Dublin mission, said in a statement that “while the Church of Scientology fully supports freedom of speech and the rights of all people to express themselves, that freedom cannot be used to foment anti-religious bigotry and hate against members of any faith. We have seen the devastating results of such anti-religious bigotry.”