

# IRISH AMERICA

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## Sikh the Fair Land

IRELAND'S MANY  
NEW CULTURES AND  
RELIGIONS

A report by Columbia  
School of Journalism

**A THOUSAND  
WELCOMES?  
IRELAND'S  
REFUGEES**

**THE QUEENS  
OF MYSTERY:  
MARY & CAROL  
HIGGINS CLARK**

**FINDING HOME:  
A FATHER & SON  
TRAVEL STORY**

**DECLARATION  
OF INTENT:  
IRISH TROOPS  
IN KOSOVO**







# faiths o' the Irish

Sixteen graduate students from Columbia University's School of Journalism traveled to Ireland and found a country of many cultures and religions.

*March 14, Day One:*  
**TRAVEL AND ROSCREA**  
 By Sarah Morgan

We flew overnight from New York to Dublin to Shannon with a Wisconsin high school marching band off to play in a St. Patrick's Day parade, we saw pagan protesters on the front page of the *Irish Times* and some of us brought garish plastic watches in a fit of suddenly-it's-6-a.m. hysteria.

Most of us woke up for real when our bus arrived at Roscrea, the monastery where we'll be spending the next two nights. We were just in time for a bountiful lunch at 1 p.m., after which we piled back on the bus for a trip into town.

The Cistercian monastery was founded in 1858 when the order bought its 500-acre farm from two elderly women in London. That farm, with its 250 cows, now provided the monastery's main source of income.

Only 17 monks now live in the cloisters. The oldest is 94-and-a-half years old, and half of the community are over 80.

"We're a bit lost in a church this size," Father Nivard Kinsella said, gesturing to the empty pews around him. "There's a very big drift away from religion in Ireland."

Most of the monks are too old

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING



Mount St. Joseph Abbey in Roscrea, County Tipperary.

to teach in the private school on the grounds. Father Kinsella himself is 81.

The Roscrea monks, not drifting anywhere, take vows of poverty, obedience and stability. This means they have no possessions of their own – and they will remain at Roscrea their entire lives (apparently St. Benedict felt that, without this vow, monks would flit around too much). They meet at 4 a.m. every morning for Vigils, a 40-minute prayer in which they watch with the Lord for the coming morning. There are three shorter offices, or prayers, during the day, followed by Vespers at 5:15 and finally Complitorium at 7:30 p.m.

After dinner this evening, we'll have a chance to see the evening church service. And then we will very gratefully get an actual night's sleep.



Zachary Goelman with Father Nivard Kinsella, a Cistercian priest.

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING



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March 15, Day 2:

### SACRED COWS AND IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

By Betwa Sharma

For two students in the journalism school group, the day began with a visit to the farmyard at 5 a.m. The

early-risers trudged with camera, tripod and radio equipment through cow dung and hay to capture the first hours of a newly born calf, and the unexpected sight of a monk dressed in farm clothes tending to the cows. Brother Malachy didn't seem to notice the overwhelming odor of the farm animals as he guided the American visitors through the pitch dark and gently persisting rain.

After the cow adventure, Brother Malachy showed his guests the "enclosure," which includes a big apple orchard where the monks read and pray, day after day and year after year. There is no sound, except for the chirping of birds.

In the pre-dawn light, he pointed to an old cottage swirling in smoke – the bakery. "That's Brother Oliver burning the peat bog," he said. The peat is used as fuel in the bakery.

It was a sight and smell from long ago.

The day for the rest of the group began at 9 a.m. with a breakfast of cereal, jam and bread. An hour later, we filed into a bus and our tour guide, John, drove through Roscrea to Shannon for a visit to a Nigerian Pentecostal church and a meeting

with Pastor Osim and his wife, Joy.

The Pentecostal movement started in the 1700s. In Nigeria, the Pentecostal church was founded in 1952 and planted its roots in Ireland in 1998. Today, there are 45 Pentecostal parishes all over Ireland.

Pastor Osim, a small earnest looking man, who belongs to the

Redeemed Christian Church of God, which has 10 parishes, explained that the Nigerian migration was not about economic emancipation but about safety – to escape religious and political persecution from the Islamic government. They chose Ireland for two reasons: the English language and Christianity.

Unlike the Catholic monks from the day before, the pastor said that Pentecostal congregations are increasing membership all over Ireland. They feel welcome with one exception— jobs. Professionals from Nigeria work as waiters and laborers because less qualified natives are given



Pastor Osim of the Nigerian Pentecostal church in Shannon, Co. Clare.

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

# The Indian Christians in Galway

By Betwa Sharma and Zachary Goelman

The ground floor entrance of the Westwood House Hotel entices passers-by with rock music and drink specials. It is a popular haunt in Galway and people mill around the bar on the eve of St. Patrick's Day. But upstairs a different scene is unfolding.

A spiral staircase leads to a dark landing with a heavy door. The rock music from the floor below grows faint, soon getting drowned on the other side of the door by people singing about Jesus Christ. "Hallelujah, hallelujah, praise the lord," they shout.

This is a congregation of Indian Christians from Kerala, a state in South India. They gather at the hotel every Sunday and pray in Malayalam, their regional language.

Congregation members estimate that there are some 300 to 400 Indian Christians in Galway, and the number has been rising steadily these past few years. They come to Ireland to study, work and make a better life. Children of these immigrants learn Malayalam at home and Gaelic at school.

While a constellation of Irish churches of various Christian denominations exists in Galway, the Malayalam-speaking Indians prefer to pray together. Many of them don't find the native Irish religious enough.

The Indian congregation is a Pentecostal service but welcomes Christians of all denominations.

Light bounces off the red carpets and walls giving the room where the faithful gather a robust glow. The prayer leader is a man named Shinil Matthew, 34. He is not a priest or a minister, but a lay leader.

A tall man, Matthew wears a checked shirt that stretches across his broad shoulders. His prominent nose and thick eyebrows give him an air of authority.

He stands facing the congregation and sets a vigorous pace for the two-hour service, singing aloud and keeping time by clapping and swaying from side to side. His eyes are closed and face wrinkled in concentration.

As the momentum builds, every person in the congregation rises up from the chairs singing and tapping their shoes to the lively beat.

The "hallelujahs" are the only words spoken in English. "We had to worship in our own language," Matthew said, over a cup of tea after the service. And even if they do they prefer to pray in Malayalam.

Another congregant, John Mathew, 30, an immigrant from Kerala, sits in the front row with one hand raised, palm open. His oiled hair is sharply slicked back and his black moustache bounces up and down as he chants. At a verse which is particularly moving for him, he clenches his palm into a fist and punches the air with an accompanying "Hallelujah."

The congregation started with a few friends gathering at Mathew's house to pray. But the number of people from Kerala





Galway: The City of the Tribes is adding new members to the fold.

increased in the past few years. The house wasn't big enough.

"We had all Christians, not just Pentecostals so everyone could not fit," said Mathew speaking through a translator because he does not speak English.

Mathew, a Pentecostal, approached the Assembly of God, a loose order of Pentecostal churches that took the Indian congregation under their wing. The Assembly's branch in Galway, called the Discovery Church, is led by Pastor Paul Cullen, and also rents space in the Westwood House Hotel.

"Many Indians come to our regular Sunday services, but some of the men felt that they couldn't participate because of the language barrier," said Cullen, 34.

The women generally speak English, something required of those who work as nurses in the Galway University Hospital.

Many Indian nurses, mostly women, have been recruited by the university hospital, which provides them with work visas. In many cases, their husbands follow and find simple jobs, or take courses at the university.

Many Malayalam-speaking Christians living here say that in Ireland religion doesn't enjoy the same primacy of place it does in India, and say that the power of faith flows more vibrantly in their small congregation than in the Irish Catholic cathedrals.

Alice Ninin, 28, nurse by training, says she "came here for better opportunities." Ninin, who belongs to the Mar Thoma Church, feels that the Christians in Ireland, particularly among the younger generation, are not religious. "In India, the churches are packed," she said. "The young people here prefer going to pubs." Many others at the congregation echo her sentiment.

Next door to the prayer room, the children of the congregants are playing. Irin Sajupaula, 9, and Silin Verghese, 8, hunch over sheets of white paper drawing with colored crayons thicker than their fingers.

These children have lived in Galway since their parents left India over a year and a half ago. Sajupaula can converse in Malayalam, Hindi, English, and began learning Irish Gaelic this year in school.

"*Ban* is white," she said, holding up the white crayon, and displaying her acquisition of Gaelic. "And *dearg* is red. *Bandearg* is pink."

Sam Verghese, 27, is a Pentecostal who moved here 10 months ago to be with his wife, who is a nurse. He believes that Christians of all denominations can pray together because "Jesus is same for everyone."

Rajesh Verghese, 38, a salesman, is a Roman Catholic. He said that even in a Pentecostal service he maintains his Catholic identity. "There is nothing wrong with singing and praying, Catholics can do that," he said.

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preference by employers. But Nigerians are confident that their children will integrate into the Irish milieu.

It was pouring by the time the bus reached St. Michael's Church, which now served the Polish, the largest immigrant population in Ireland. The official figures are 200,000 but Father Szymon Czuwaia, one of 30 Polish priests dispatched to care for the spiritual needs of the immigrants, said that the actual numbers are probably double the official figures.

Father Czuwaia dismisses allegations against the Irish of resenting the "Polish plumber." He said that the Polish immigrants have been treated better in Ireland than in any other country.

"We share a common history of persecution," he said matter-of-factly.

March 16, Day 3:

BRIGHT LIGHTS  
BIG CITY

By Robbie Corey-Boulet

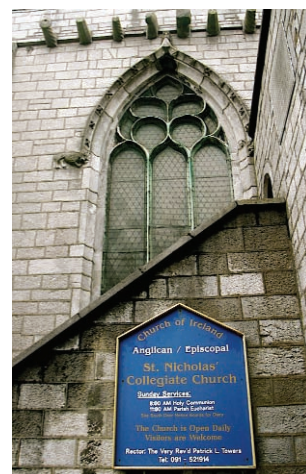
For those of us who favor the metropolitan to the monastic, our first view of Galway seemed a harbinger of only good things — an

uninterrupted line of bars, bistros and cafes provided a sharp contrast from the vast swaths of farmland characteristic of the drive from Roscrea, in County Tipperary.

After we left the bus and took our first steps along Shop Street, bells rang out from the Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas, the largest medieval church in Ireland. The gesture — to express solidarity with victims of the recent violence in Lhasa, Tibet — offered evidence of the church's heightened awareness and respect for other cultures and religions.

Though a member of the Anglican Communion, the Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas is interdenominational. Canon Maureen Ryan said the church attracts many "transients" — when the students leave for the summer (Galway is home to one of Ireland's leading universities), the tourists begin arriving en masse.

Being both students and tourists, we took our seats in the nave for the 11 a.m. Palm Sunday Eucharist, which featured a dramatic rendering of The Passion of the Christ according to St. Matthew.



St. Nicholas Collegiate Church in Galway City.



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Canon Maureen Ryan is interviewed by Robbie Corey-Boulet.

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

After the Eucharist two Nigerian immigrants baptized their son. Assorted relatives and friends — including Catholics and Pentecostal Evangelicals — gathered around the stone baptismal font in the back of the nave to witness the ritual. The parents wore blue-and-white garments with African prints, while the little boy wore a white christening gown. To conclude the ceremony, the worshippers lit candles and sang “This Little Light of Mine.”

The Rev. Patrick Towers, who performed the ceremony, said the open nature of the Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas, which was founded in 1320, reflects an acknowledgement that other Christian faiths can be just as valid as Anglicanism. To say that only one approach can lead to salvation, he said, would be presumptuous and potentially misguided. Anglican churches, he said, “are not at the top of any moral or ethical mountain. We’re all on a pilgrimage.”

March 17, Day 4:

A DAY IN THE PAST  
By Liz Bello

A 20-minute ride on a ferry was all it took to travel back in time 100 years.

Although Inis

Mor is said to be the most developed of the three Aran islands, its connection to the past is undeniable.

We arrived at the Na Seacht d'Teampaill (the Seven Churches), an early pilgrim site. The ruins of two of the original churches remain: 13th-century Temple Breacan and 15th-century Teampall an Phoill. The group then embarked on an uphill climb to the Dún Aonghusa, the Bronze Age stone fort that stands 100 meters above the sea, one of the most important prehistoric sites in Europe.

The trip concluded with a conversation with Connla O'Dúláine, a priest who joined the Arainn Catholic Church in 1974. He spoke of how the



Na Seacht d'Teampaill Cemetery.

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

# The Cavan Mongolian Connection

By Rachel King

Jampa Ling, the residential Buddhist retreat center in County Cavan in the heart of Ireland, aims to spread Buddhist tradition and culture through chanting and meditation, but it also has a strong commitment to re-establish Buddhism in Mongolia and help the country's impoverished citizens.

Jampa Ling is fulfilling its charitable mission through scarves, slippers and handbags that it imports from Mongolia and then sells to high-end boutiques in Ireland and now in America through a micro-finance project called Made in Mongolia (MIM). Through the program, impoverished single mothers are being given the opportunity to make a living to support their children's education.

“What we started doing was training women in something that gave them a job and a sense of their own value as well,” said the Venerable Tenin Choeden, a Buddhist and native Irishwoman, also referred to as Ani La, “Ani” meaning “nun” and “La” as a distinction of honor. Additional aid is being given through the partnership to provide assistance with health, food, and heating.

Pat McCarthy, an Irish designer and a student of Venerable Panchen Ötrul Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist monk and the spiritual leader at Jampa Ling, volunteered to make the trek to Mongolia and assist the workers. For two weeks, he worked with the women on altering the designs to make them more colorful and desirable to Western customers. When Pat returned to Ireland, Ani La said, he determined there was a basis for a business, but the products would have to be high-quality, and a high return was required from initial orders.

McCarthy assembled a team of volunteers to design leaflets and packaging, while he sent associates to Mongolia to manage the production.

After the women produced some samples, he made a sales pitch to Avoca, a high-end clothing and home-décor boutique in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

With a fair-trade ethos, the sales pitch was a huge success. Shipping to four stores in Dublin and one store in Belfast in October 2007, the demand was so great that the Mongolian women needed more time to complete the handmade orders.

“We had to ask them to reduce the order from 500 to 300,” said Desmond Gough, the grounds manager at Jampa Ling, “and they sold out. It was phenomenal.”



Panchen Ötrul Rinpoche at prayer.

PHOTO BY ANDREW NUSCA



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PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

A group shot with Panchen Ötrul Rinpoche.

This past year, it was determined that the center was too small to accommodate the workers and their growing demand for more products, thus an additional Buddhist-sponsored center is being scouted to expand the business.

The Irish Buddhist center's efforts got off the ground in 1995 when Rinpoche made his first pilgrimage to Mongolia. With permission from the Dalai Lama, he continues to visit and work on bringing Buddhism back to the northern Asian country.

Since the breakup of the Communist Soviet Union in 1991, Mongolia, a traditionally Buddhist nation, has been experiencing a difficult transition to democracy. As many families have moved to Mongolia's capital city, Ulaanbaatar, there has been a sharp increase in the poverty level, as many are unable to find work.

Thanks to the efforts of Rinpoche and his fellow Irish believers, a partnership, Asral Charity, was struck in 2001 between Mongolian and Irish Buddhists to support families and keep them together. A Buddhist center was opened in the capital city along with a number of philanthropic projects sourced there.

"When Rinpoche opened the center, he recognized people needed work, because when the Communists moved out of Mongolia, the infrastructure completely broke down," Gough said while standing in the main house of the three-building Buddhist center next to the center's gift shop, displaying a variety of goods produced by the Mongolian women.

Typical winter temperatures in Mongolia fall below 22 degrees Fahrenheit, threatening the lives of many, especially those in severe poverty. Most households are run by single mothers, who are some of the poorest citizens in their society. Most women work to prevent their children from being sent to orphanages or ending up on the street.

"We identified families where the woman was the main breadwinner," Gough continued, "The children of those women were in danger of being street children, dropping out of school."

All funding for Rinpoche's projects in Mongolia comes from Ireland, Ani La noted.

MIM is opening the sales market to the United States, with the first American order at Moonjar in Seattle, Wash.

"We're delighted," Ani La said of the American market expansion. "The more orders we can get, the more work we can provide for the women in Mongolia."

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island has managed to preserve the traditional Irish culture and language, despite growing tourism and technology.

"Our liturgy is all in Irish and that helps the islanders to preserve their Gaelic," he said. Islanders may leave the church but they return.

"They fall at around age 17 when they leave to school," he said. "But I see them return to church no later than age 30. It's almost like they're going off, getting educated, but eager to return home."

### March 18, Day 5: PILGRIMS AND PUJA By Deborah Lee

Under a second morning of sunny skies we left Galway and traveled north to Donegal.

Following the footsteps

of generations of pilgrims, we explored the grounds of St. Patrick's Purgatory, located on an island in the middle of an enormous lake.

This famous destination draws more than 20,000 believers per year, mostly Catholic and interdenominational Christians. Commonly referred to as "Lough Derg," where, legend has it, the country's patron saint fasted and received visions of purgatory, this place has inspired centuries of pilgrims to flock to the island. They seek penance, divine intervention or simply an escape from worldly distractions of everyday life.

Most come for the three-day pilgrimage, a rigorous experience consisting of walking barefoot, fasting and staying awake for 24 hours. Lough Derg ground manager Deborah Maxwell explained that these physical sacrifices are spiritual disciplines that allow people to reach their spiritual core.

The sky alternated between rain and sunshine as students walked the winding prayer paths, wandered through the great stone Basilica and snapped pictures of the penitential prayer beds. The waves of the surrounding lake rippled in circles around the island.

"I think even the dramatic weather had a good effect," said Rachel Rosenthal. "It was very remote. There is nothing you can do except reflect there."

After leaving Lough Derg, we made our way to County Cavan, where our tour made its first step towards Eastern religion. At Jampa Ling, a Buddhist center tucked behind woods with narrow gravel paths, crisp air and Tibetan



PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

Pilgrims walk around Penitent Path in St. Patrick's Purgatory.



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Buddhists greeted us.

We shared a meal of fresh salad and steaming bowls of curry vegetable soup with monks and other believers, swapping stories of our faith journey through Ireland with their journey to Jampa Ling.

One monk, Lobsang Wangchuck — his ordained name — shared with two students how the sex abuse scandal that shook the Catholic Church and his life directed his path toward Buddhism.. Two years ago, on his 60th birthday, Wangchuck became the first Western monk ordained by the center's lama, the Ven. Panchen ötrul Rimpoche.

After dinner everyone crowded into a small room for Puja, a practice of meditation and training of the mind. The lama, his followers and the Columbia University students sat cross-legged, eyes closed before a large red-painted shrine filled with images of deities, a large framed photograph of the Dali Lama, and Buddhist statues. Ani La, the center's nun, led the meditation service in both English and Tibetan chants.

Though it was new for many students, some earnestly embraced the experience. "I really did enjoy it, even though I had no idea what they were saying," said Rachel Rosenthal.

*March 19, Day 6:*

**ON THE ROAD TO RECONCILIATION**  
By Pilar Conci

The day started early in Jampa Ling. Before jumping on the bus once again, we had breakfast with the lama, Ani La and the other Buddhists.

Some of them walked with us to the main road to say goodbye. One of the women even got on the bus and sang one of the songs performed the previous night during the puja, before we left for Northern Ireland.



PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

A Buddha welcomes springtime in Ireland.

# Belfast's Hindu Temple

By Sharon Udasin

**T**he aroma of Indian spices fills the old Protestant church on Clifton Street, now transformed into a Hindu temple. Images of Indian gods and goddesses have supplanted those of Jesus Christ, but the house of worship remains intact, a stable fixture on the borderline between Northern Irish tensions.

The temple, Laxmi Narayana Mandir, is located at 86 Clifton St. in Belfast, directly on the midline that separates Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods, according to its residents. Indian rugs and portraits of Hindu deities hang side-by-side with Christian stained glass and other remnants of the former church. An anomaly in this predominantly Christian city, the Hindu temple belongs on neither side of the religious feud and seems like a refuge for peace amidst conflict.

Above the temple sanctuary and up the winding stairs to the building's second floor, Gopi Sharma, the temple's priest, lives with his wife and two teenage children. He speaks minimal English and called for his daughter when I arrived.

Wrapped in a cream-colored blanket over pajama sweatpants, the 16-year-old girl introduced herself as Poonam Sharma. Her long shiny black hair was pulled back into a ponytail, and she wore a simply studded ring in her nose. Sharma was home enjoying her Easter break on this Thursday morning, relaxing in the family's living quarters and relishing her day off.

The building was an active Protestant church 25 years ago, as conflicts raged on between the Catholic and Protestant populations of the city, Sharma explained. Amidst the turmoil, a Hindu priest purchased the building approximately 19 years ago, inadvertently neutralizing a place of former conflict.

"The people didn't want this to go to a Catholic or Protestant, so they sold it to a Hindu," Sharma said.

The original priest presided over and lived in the converted temple for 10 years, after which a second priest took over for the next five. Following these two leaders, Sharma's father arrived as priest four years ago, leaving a Hindu temple in Kenya.

"I've actually got a mixture of Indian, African and Belfast," Sharma said, chuckling at her positively unique accent. Initially, she wanted to move back to Africa, but after beginning school in Belfast, Sharma became better acquainted with the city.

"It took another year to settle down," she said. "A quarter of me still feels that I'm different from everyone."

After she finishes high school and college, Sharma hopes to become a psychologist.

"More than half are nurses or in the medical businesses," she said, pointing to the popularity of medicine among Indians.

As she walked downstairs to the temple itself, Sharma explained that visitors must leave their shoes outside its glass doors. Inside the sanctuary, plush red carpet lines the floor, and matching velveteen drapes clothe the large-scale dioramas, encasing a series of sparkling deities in emerald green garb. In the center compartment sits the largest pair of statues, the two adopted as the temple's central deities — Narayana, another name for the god Vishnu, and his consort Lakshmi.



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Adjacent to the sanctuary is a huge hall for Hawan, a monthly prayer service that now brings 50 to 60 worshippers, in a congregation that began quite small. "Not a single person used to come to the temple when it first started," Sharma said.

Gradually, however, Hindu residents began to trickle in for festivals, Sharma explained, and now over 800 people from Northern Ireland come to the temple for Diwali, the Hindu "Festival of Light," typically celebrated in October. Indians travel from as far as London to celebrate Diwali at Laxmi Naranaya, where they sing and dance in the huge upstairs auditorium, next to the family's living area.

"That's the only time we come together to celebrate a func-

PHOTO BY SHARON UDASIN



Gods and goddesses adorn the altar at the Hindu temple in Belfast.

tion," Sharma said. Despite having a temple of their own, Belfast Hindus do not always take advantage of the building's unique cultural opportunities.

"People have been living here for 30 years and they forget their culture," Sharma said.

Many of Sharma's Indian friends have been in the country for decades and have assimilated to the culture, including 26-year-old Natasha, who declined to provide her last name.

"You could pretty much call us Irish by now," confirmed Natasha, whose family has been living in the United Kingdom for four generations. "I'm on a British passport, but if you asked me what I am I would classify myself as Northern Irish."

With little diversity in a largely Christian society, assimilation is convenient and comfortable.

"I go to a Protestant school," Sharma said. "All I get here is Protestant, Catholic, Protestant, Catholic." Interestingly, however, she observed that each contingent of her Christian friends is afraid to enter the opposite group's territory. Meanwhile, Sharma has both Catholic and Protestant friends, but neither sect will speak to the other.

Sharma can recognize the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant by the way they speak.

"Catholics would speak in a different way," she said. "Protestants are more rough and tough."

And though Sharma continues to study Hindu culture and take classical Indian dance classes, she is becoming more and more Northern Irish – so much so that she has decided she wants to stay there, where she is a minority within a sea of white faces. She has no intention of moving to India or even to London, where Hindus live in densely packed neighborhoods.

"I'm just not used to seeing so many Indians," she said. IA

We traveled through the county of Armagh arriving just after noon at the Darkley House, headquarters of Crossfire Trust, an organization based in Keady, which works towards reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

Operating since 1986, the Trust offers assistance and support to those who still suffer the consequences of the violent conflict between Catholics and Protestants that ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement.

"We have glass walls, our society is still sectarian," said Ian Bothwell, from Crossfire Trust. Over lunch, he explained that a lot of people in that area were revisiting their past. "We have a lot of superficial contact. We need a new dose of sincerity towards peace building." The scars of the conflict are not remotely healed. Last November, a man was beaten to death in connection with things that happened years ago.

Our last visit of the day was Richhill Methodist Church, also in the Armagh area. We met with the Rev. Paul Ritchie, his wife Caroline, and Alan McMullan, a former Loyalist paramilitary who talked about his experience of finding God in jail.

Ritchie and his wife, who recently settled in Northern Ireland, talked about the experience of growing up Protestant in the overwhelmingly Catholic Republic of Ireland. "I long for the days this is a mixed community," the reverend said.

Our first day in Northern Ireland was very educational. "It was interesting to see a non-idyllic place," said Deborah Lee-Hjelle. "The people at Crossfire explained how difficult it's been in their town. It was interesting to be there and see it, as a complement of what we studied in class."

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING



Alan McMullan talks, a former member of the loyalist paramilitary.

*March 20, Day 7:*

**PEACE LINE AND PURIM**

By Sharon Udasin

Waking up cozily in Europe's most bombed hotel, we each embarked in different directions on this rainy Belfast

morning, where we had two hours to report stories independently.

After breakfast, Laura Insensee and Deborah Lee-Hjelle explored a section of Belfast called "the village," where they interviewed some migrant workers, including an Albanian Muslim family. Meanwhile, Robbie Corey-Boulet visited an Anglican church that had initiated talks with a neighboring mosque in the aftermath of post-9/11 hate crimes. Debra Katz and Andrew Nusca





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wandered around the city taking pictures of historical graffiti and murals, while other students reported from their hotel rooms.

At 11:30 a.m., the nine students who had returned from reporting boarded the bus for a short drive to the Shankill Methodist Church in West Belfast. As we got off the bus, the Reverend Jim Rea greeted the group and ushered us into the church — a no-frills, high-ceiling sanctuary with a simple gold cross balanced on the altar and the words “This Do In Remembrance of Me” etched in the wood below.

Although tensions have quieted and violence has mostly subsided, the Shankill neighborhood



PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

A group shot with Gerry Adams in Belfast.

still experiences what Rea calls “recreational rioting.”

Within Shankill’s dwindling population, Rea sees a dramatic increase in secularization, as people move away from both religion and the neighborhood. Three local Methodist churches have combined their congregations in one.

Aboard the bus for a tour of the neighborhood, Rea guided us to the peace line, a 20-mile blockade that separates the Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods of Belfast. “An awful lot of people died in this area,” Rea said.

Later the bus rolled to a stop outside of the Sinn Féin headquarters for our meeting with Gerry Adams, the leader of the Sinn Féin party.

“The conflict in Ireland is not a religious conflict,” Adams said. “Religion doesn’t matter, shouldn’t matter.” He acknowledges that there has been a longstanding cleavage between Catholicism and Protestantism but feels that the divide was never about theology.

As far as his personal beliefs? “I’m sort of an à la carte Catholic-Buddhist,” Adams said.

At the end of our private session with Adams, we followed him outside of the Sinn Féin headquarters, where he was conducting a “doorstep” open meeting with members of the Belfast media.

After lunch and a second bus tour of the city, the group gathered in the hotel restaurant for a buffet-style dinner. At 7 p.m., we left for the

# Baghdad in Dublin

By Betwa Sharma and Zachary Goelman

**O**n Good Friday almost one thousand Dubliners face Mecca and touch their foreheads to the carpeted floor. Released from their jobs for the Easter holiday, hundreds of Muslims flocked to the palatial Islamic Cultural Center in Clonskeagh, County Dublin, for their own weekly Friday prayer.

Tareq Sammaree, 58, is a frequent visitor to the Sunni mosque. A former Baghdad University professor who sought asylum in Ireland after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Sammaree is a long-time Ba’ath party member and remembers Saddam Hussein fondly.

“He made some mistakes, but he was a good man,” says Sammaree.

But other Iraqis in Ireland feel differently.

A fifteen-minute walk away from the grand Sunni mosque stands the Ahlul Beyt Islamic Center, the only Shi’ite house of worship in Ireland, where Ahmed Ali, 38, prays.

Ahlul ran away from Iraq to escape Saddam Hussein’s persecution of the Shi’ites. “The day he was executed was the happiest day of my life,” he says.

The legacy of the former dictator is but one issue that divides Iraqi Sunnis and Shi’ites. Even in Dublin, far removed from the bloody fighting in the streets of Baghdad and Karbala, sectarian identities flare up.

The Muslim community in Ireland is fast-growing, with official estimates of roughly 40,000 adherents. Iraqi refugees from the violence in their home country are the latest to join this community. Although they leave behind them the physical violence, they bring with them many of their sectarian prejudices.

Discord between Sunnis and Shi’ites in Dublin heightened after the invasion of Iraq. The bloody tales of torture, suicide bombings and execution squads employed by both groups have strained relations in Dublin.

Imam Dr. Ali Saleh is the leader of the Shia mosque. Born in the Iraqi city of Najaf, he lived for a while in Saudi Arabia, close to the border with Iraq. He came to Dublin in 1985, and remembers a time when relations between the two groups were cordial.

“The Sunnis used to come down to the Shia mosque all the time,” he says; “they don’t anymore.”

The Shi’ite Muslims say that tensions began after the U.S. invasion, when

The Ahlul Beyt Islamic Center in Dublin.



PHOTO COURTESY AHLUL BEYT ISLAMIC CENTER

# faiths o' the Irish



PHOTO COURTESY AHLUL BEYT ISLAMIC CENTER

Imam Dr. Ali Saleh, leader of the Shia mosque in Dublin.

Shi'ites gained power in Iraq.

Dr. Hameed Albdri, 28, an Iraqi Sunni by birth, said he used to visit the Shia mosque.

"I used to visit with my friend, but my friend was asked not to bring me back again," Albdri says. He's lived in Ireland for six years, and saw the change after the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent explosion of sectarian violence.

Ahmed Ali, who came to Dublin from Mosul in 1999, remembers a time when it was easy to crack a Shia-Sunni joke. But no longer. "They cannot handle it anymore," he says.

Tareq Sammaree sees little humor in the current situation. The former Baghdad University professor lost everything when Saddam Hussein fell and the Ba'ath party lost power. Shi'ite paramilitaries kidnapped him and his son and tortured him for more than a year. He was released, but his son is still missing. He fled the country, seeking asylum in Dublin.

Fatima Mussam, 16, a Sunni who came from Mosul, Iraq, to Dublin in 2002, blames the sectarian violence in Iraq on the Shi'ites. Fatima says that she had Shi'ite 'acquaintances' in school, but they were not her friends. "I won't deliberately be rude to them but I don't like them," she says. Mussam, whose family left Mosul because her family anticipated the war, blames the sectarian violence in Iraq on the Shi'ites. "They started it," she says. She is also contemptuous of the Shi'ite faith. "It is going against Islam," she says.

The small Shi'ite community in Dublin fears that the sectarian divisions are exacerbated by Fatima's conviction, shared by some Sunnis, that the Shi'ite are not true Muslims.

Zahra Rahim, 47, is a Shi'ite from Hilla, near the city of Babylon in Iraq. Her son, Jafar, 15, attended Muslim National School, a primary school under Sunni management.

Rahim says her son has been called 'kafir,' which means unbeliever, by Sunni students and occasionally been taunted when the Shi'ites suffer in the ongoing sectarian violence in Iraq.

"Who teaches them this?" Rahim asks. "It is not the teachers. The children get this understanding from their parents."

"Sectarian feelings are inherent," says Imam Saleh. "Whether it is Catholics and Protestants or Shi'ites and Sunnis. We are living between people who have suffered from sectarian violence. We should learn from them."

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PHOTO COURTESY AHLUL BEYT ISLAMIC CENTER

Orthodox Hebrew Congregation, to celebrate the Jewish festival of Purim.

Capped in a golden speckled party hat, Rabbi Menachem Brackman, 26, led Purim services, a joyful holiday for Jews not unlike St. Patrick's Day where people dress up and have fun. Wrapped in a long black coat and sporting a characteristically Hasidic beard, Brackman and his wife Ruth, 22, moved with their six-month-old son to Belfast only five and a half weeks ago, to take over the vacated rabbinical position.

Part of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, the young couple are beginning a six-month trial period in Belfast, before deciding whether or not they would like to be official Chabad shlichim (emissaries). Although the Jewish community has been a fixture in Belfast for the past 150 years, the congregation has fallen to 108 members, with sparse access to kosher foods and Jewish life.

Yet both Menachem and Ruth Brackman were pleased with the evening's turnout, a gathering of nearly 50 congregants. Among the participants this evening were longtime residents and recent migrants from Israel. Rabbi Brackman whizzed through the Megillah reading at turbo speed, pausing occasionally to catch his breath. Jews and non-Jews alike clanked their noise-makers and banged on the glossy wooden pews every time he voiced Haman's name.

After the service, congregants and visitors gathered together in the lobby and hall attached to the sanctuary, where they shared hamantashen, coffee and conversation. Brackman made his rounds dispensing

shots of Scotch whiskey and quietly disappeared to reemerge as a full-feathered yellow chicken, to conduct a children's costume contest.

The few children attending the service flocked around the rabbi in their elaborate costumes, which most notably featured Spiderman and a giant banana. Despite these scattered young faces, the average age was over 75 years old.

Northern Irish Jews find sanctuary in a community where for once they aren't a minority and can enjoy common traditions of generations past. Although they find very few Jewish people walking the street of Belfast, they rarely face anti-Semitism and find that the majority population is very accepting of their culture.

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING



Professor Goldman with Rabbi Menachen Brackman in costume for Purim.





## faiths o' the Irish

March 21, Day 8:

DUBLIN: PAST AND PRESENT

By Jamie McGee

Two members of the Garda Síochána were the first people we met as we

traveled back into the Republic of

Ireland this morning. They were not there to welcome us, but pulled us over to check our passports, another indication of how the political climate and demographics have changed in Ireland. During the Troubles police conducted searches at the borders for weaponry. Today they are looking for illegal immigrants.

We spent the first part of our afternoon at the Islamic Cultural Center of Ireland, one of the two mosques in Dublin. The males in our group joined the more than 700 men on the first floor while the females in our group, each wearing headscarves, sat upstairs with about 200 women. The faces in the mosque reflected the growing immigrant population in Ireland from countries around the world, but also included those born in Ireland. "I met two women who had converted from Catholicism," Sarah Morgan said.

The mosque, built in 1979, felt open and expansive, with tall ceilings and a large dome space in the ceiling's center. "The building got my attention," said Pilar Conci. "It was big and new. None of the mosques I went to in New York were like this."

During these services, Imam Hussein Halawa spoke Arabic and then the mosque secretary translated the sermon into English. Halawa, who came to Ireland from Egypt in 1996, spoke emphatically, even yelling at times. The congregation prayed together standing in perfect rows and bowing their heads to the ground. Betwa Sharma said she enjoyed listening to the prayers in such a large crowd. "I liked when they all said 'amen'—the echoing," she said. "I liked that we got to hear that."

After the mosque, some students explored and reported in Dublin, while others went to the Hill



Muslims at the Islamic Cultural Center of Ireland, one of the two mosques in Dublin.

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

# Sikh the Fair Land

By Jamie McGee

Harpreet Singh moved to Ireland from India three weeks after 9-11 and looked for work in Dublin without success for two months. About 30 applications later, he still had no prospects. He knew the turban on his head and his long beard, both identifications of his Sikh faith, were not helping his chances. Meanwhile, people on the streets often shouted "bin Laden" and sometimes threw bottles at him. He went to the barber and cut the hair that he had grown 17 years since birth, and shaved his beard, abandoning one of the core duties of Sikhism.

"It was very hard," he said. "I cry on that day."

Shortly after, Singh was hired at a merchandising cash-and-carry shop, but he felt empty inside, he said. A year later, after growing more connected to the Sikh community in Dublin and to his Sikh beliefs, he decided to once again wear the turban and grow out his hair. No sooner than he returned to the faith, the abuses on the street began again. A day after the 2005 London bombings a group of men attacked him as he was leaving a grocery store and he was stabbed in the hand.

Singh, now 25, is not alone in handling frequent discrimination in a country that has only recently been introduced to Sikhism through an increasing number of Sikh immigrants. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism in Dublin reports about 1,200 Sikhs in Ireland, although Sikhs there estimate the number is closer to 3,000, a population that has grown extensively in the last five or six years because of economic and academic opportunity. Most of the Sikhs in Ireland live in Dublin and a majority of them are students of business or technology who hope to take their skills back to Punjab one day or find jobs in Ireland. While acceptance is growing and more people are learning about Sikhism, the faith is still often wrongly associated with terrorism and Islam. Negative stereotypes still thrive, and some Sikhs choose to stop wearing the turban.

"They throw bottles, it happens many times," said Gurmeet Singh, 26. "Now it is better than before. If people do know about Sikhs, they are respectful."

Sikhism developed in northern India in the 15th century and has more than 25 million followers worldwide. The faith denounces blind ritual and emphasizes equality among all mankind and devotion to one god. Sikhs follow the teaching of 10 gurus and are taught to be both saints and soldiers, using the sword only when others cannot defend themselves.

On a recent morning at Dublin's only Gurdwara, or Sikh temple, a group of men explained they have all learned to ignore such comments and incidents, knowing that it stems from ignorance more than anything else and that anger does not solve their problems. To find work they learn which sectors are accepting of the turban and which ones to avoid. The restaurant sector, which depends on tourism, is especially difficult to penetrate, they said.

"We ignore abuses," said Jasbir Singh Puri, a surgeon who immigrated to Dublin 20 years ago. "You end up in a brawl. We

PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

## faiths o' the Irish



Dublin's only Gurdwara, a Sikh Temple.

are peace-loving people.”

Puri, who has a grey beard, said children often ask him if he is Aladdin, or where is his magic carpet, and he will happily explain his turban and his faith to them. “They ask me are you a genie?” If they ask if he is a Taliban member, however, he takes offense, he said. “I’ll resent that. But I will not blame the child. I blame the parents.”

While the Sikhs interviewed could laugh and joke about some of the abuses they endured from other citizens, they were less tolerant of the government’s rejection of the turban in the Army and in the police force, known as the An Garda Síochána. To be excluded from military and police because of their turban is counter to their religion, the men said.

Last August, a Sikh training to serve in the Garda was told to give up his turban if he wanted to begin work, a turban ban that drew criticism from Sikh organizations worldwide. A spokesman for the An Garda Síochána said that the turban was a breach of the Garda’s uniform and that the Garda was not advocating one religious belief over another, nor being racist.

Puri, however, said that the Sikhs should be able to integrate without giving up the turban.

“The turban is like a crown. We cannot take it off. If the Garda is not allowing a person to do community service, it’s a violation of a fundamental right of equal employment.”

But there are several Sikhs who have decided that they must remove the turban to survive in their new country. Such choices are not unique to Ireland, as Sikhs in the United States and even India have also abandoned the turban for employment, athletics or comfort. While some Sikhs do not look down on those who abandon the turban and understand the struggle, they say that abandoning the turban means that you are no longer a full Sikh.

Harpreet Singh said he did not tell his parents, who are farmers in Punjab, that he had stopped wearing a turban. Seven years later, he is still apologetic about his decision to cut his hair.

“This is new country, this is new people,” he said, explaining the loneliness and uncertainty he felt when he moved to Ireland to pursue a degree in information technology. “I come after 9-11. People look at you in a different way. They say things very rudely.”

Singh lived with his cousins at the time and said he felt shame when he returned from the barber. “I go home, have a shower. I was upset for a few days,” he said. “They were think-

*Continued on page 42*

of Tara, where St. Patrick achieved victory over Pagan Druids in the fifth century. With strong winds roaring around us, we walked up a hill to see monuments dating from 3500 B.C. to the seventh century A.D. Two rings of man-made ridges mark the hill’s crown. In the middle of one ring, a circle of stones surround a phallic monument called Lia Fáil, or stone of destiny, where the High Kings of Ireland were crowned.

*March 22, Day 9:*  
**FREE DAY IN DUBLIN'S FAIR CITY**  
By Conn Corrigan

Taking advantage of a free day, many of us branched off to shop, visit museums or explore other attractions in Dublin.

Some of us opted to take in some more religion and went along to a Sikh temple called Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar, in Sandymount Dublin, about a 10-minute drive from the city center.

Shortly after 10 a.m., we arrived at the temple, which was founded in 1987. It is the only Sikh temple for the 3,000-plus Sikhs in Ireland, and 200 to 400 people worship there each Sunday.

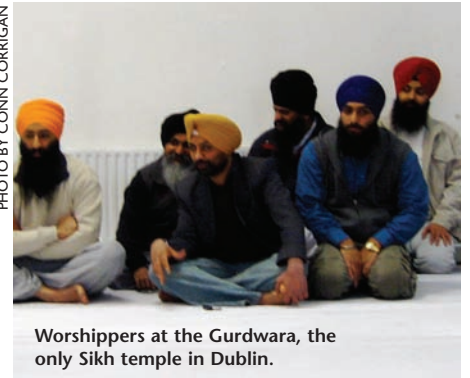
After entering, we took off our shoes in the lobby and took note of a sign that stated, “Please do not bring alcohol or tobacco onto the premises.” Because it’s a requirement that hair be covered, Melanie, Mary Catherine and Jamie each brought scarves, while John and I donned orange bandanas that were on offer.

Jasvir Singh, a priest at the temple who came to Ireland in 1996 from Punjab, in India, lives at the temple, which is open 24 hours a day. Many of the Sikhs who come to worship are students, Jasvir said. Others work in the field of medicine.

Although there was no service or event scheduled, 10 worshippers showed up to meet us. During most of our meetings throughout the trip, reporters vastly outnumbered sources. Today, however, was a different story, and the five of us who visited the temple and were able to interview those present felt rather spoiled.

The men launched into a detailed account of their experiences in Ireland. Before the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, they said, many Irish were simply curious about Sikhs’ beards and turbans. But the treatment of Sikhs in Ireland worsened considerably following the attacks.

PHOTO BY CONN CORRIGAN



Worshippers at the Gurdwara, the only Sikh temple in Dublin.





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The men also recalled the case of a Sikh in Ireland who wanted to join the police force but was told he would have to remove his turban. This case proved especially offensive. "A turban is like a crown – you cannot take it off," said Dr. Jasbir Singh Puri, a trustee at the temple. "We have to keep our identity at all costs. We want to be integrated, not assimilated."

Despite these incidents of discrimination, the men had generally favorable impressions of Irish people. Even when discussing troubling events, they spoke without anger or hatred.

In the afternoon, about 12 of us met at Trinity College for a tour of the campus and a viewing of the *Book of Kells*. Laura Insensee said she found the Coptic influence on the design of the book fascinating, as she has been studying the Christian Orthodox faith. "To learn about that connection was really interesting," she said.

Later, Pilar Conci went to a Polish Catholic church on High Street, where she saw groups of Polish people waiting for a priest to bless the food they will eat on Easter Sunday. "This isn't something that Irish Catholics would do," Pilar said. "It's a uniquely Polish Catholic experience."

In the evening, Laura and I attended a service at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, the first Russian Orthodox Church established in Ireland, located in the inner suburb Harold's Cross. Because it is a former Church of Ireland chapel, it features stained glass windows and balconies, two features atypical of Russian Orthodox churches. Around 20 people arrived for the prayer service, and all of the women wore headscarves, a requirement of this church. The wonderful singing of the priest along with the five-person

ing he left his faith. I disappointed myself as well. That's why I came back."

Cutting his hair made him reflect more on his faith and he began visiting the Dublin temple, formally known as the Guru Nanak Gurdwara. He learned more about Sikhism and realized that the discrimination he faced with a turban was a small struggle in comparison to the Sikhs who lived before him. "If you see our history, our past Sikhs gave their life for our faith."

The Gurdwara welcomed him back as a full Sikh when he chose to grow his hair out again and wrap it in a turban each morning. "I feel good," he said. "Everybody says it is very good to come back."

When a group of men came after him with a knife after the London bombings, Singh was shaken. He had raised his hand to protect himself, otherwise the man who attacked him would have stabbed his face, he said. He contemplated moving home, but felt at ease again after a few days. This time, however, he was not questioning his choice to wear a turban. "I am more strong," he said.

Now Singh works at a home equipment store and is in school for his second degree, this time in business. "If I go back I have good knowledge in international market," he said.

The Sikh men discussing their experiences in Ireland said despite the discrimination they feel, there are signs that acceptance is growing. Singh and about 40 other men from the Gurdwara recently danced and marched in the St. Patrick's Day parade in Dublin, an invitation Puri described as a great honor. The men at the Gurdwara also formed a soccer team that played in a recent Against Racism tournament, in which teams from different religious and ethnic groups play one another. Events such as these have made them feel more connected and increase awareness and understanding of their faith, but they are skeptical that the climate of discrimination will change any time soon. Puri said it is a piece of the Sikh history that will carry far into the future.

"We will always be fighting against injustice," he said. **IA**

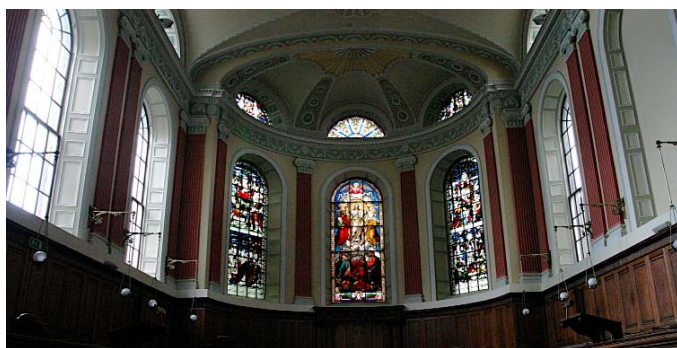


PHOTO BY RACHEL KING

Inside Trinity College Chapel on the campus of Trinity College.

choir, which mixed beautiful melodies with pitch-perfect harmonies, was particularly striking.

The experience of Russian Orthodox Christians in Ireland has been less turbulent than that of the Sikhs, at least according to the Rev. Michael Gogoless, who said the church has a "very good" relationship with the Catholic Church.

"We do work hand in hand," he said, referring to issues such as their stance against abortion,

and other social policy positions. He said that one-third of his congregation is made up of Irish worshippers, some of whom married a Russian Orthodox Christian and then converted.

In the morning, students peeled themselves out of bed to eat a final Irish breakfast at the Camden Court Hotel. Robbie Corey-Boulet managed to attend an 8 a.m. Easter mass. Some stayed in the hotel to pack. An ambitious crew continued to the Irish Jewish Museum at 3 Walworth Road in the Portobello section of Dublin.

Raphael Siev, the museum's curator, greeted Columbia students at 10 a.m. with some Irish-Jewish history and a tour of the museum. From Torah covers to Jewish business cards, the converted synagogue bursts at the seams with seemingly arbitrary relics of Dublin's Jewish memory.

"My first thought was New York apartment," said Melanie Huff. "You got the feeling that it was Jewish, it belonged."

Soon after we were winging our way back home to New York, our ten-day trip to a fascinating land over. **IA**