

# An Irish Journey into Celtic Spirituality

**The origins of Celtic spirituality may be ancient, but the beliefs are still practical today.**

**By Susan Hines-Brigger**

Ireland is a land with one foot in the here-and-now and one strongly planted in its history. The country is a study in contrasts. Ireland is currently experiencing an economic boom thanks to the computer industry, but still relishes and celebrates its roots in simplicity. Every year, around five million people visit this country that is only 189 miles wide and 302 miles long but enjoys a history and appeal of much larger proportions.

So too is the case with Celtic spirituality. For even though it has its roots in the pagan beliefs of the ancient Celts (pronounced Kelts), its basic tenets still resonate with Christians today. As a matter of fact, Celtic spirituality is experiencing a resurgence these days.

Last June, I had the opportunity to accompany 29 fellow pilgrims on a 12-day journey to discover the history and spirituality of Ireland. The pilgrimage, which was sponsored by the College of Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati, Ohio, was led by Sister John Miriam Jones, S.C., academic dean of the college and author of *With an Eagle's Eye: A Seven-day Sojourn in Celtic Spirituality*.

## **Who Were the Celts?**

According to Sister John Miriam, the Celts were people whose faith permeated every aspect of their lives. They were originally from Central Europe, and inhabited Ireland—as well as England and Scotland and Brittany in northern France—around 500-150 B.C. after being driven to the west and north, mostly by the Romans.

St. Patrick introduced Christianity to the Celts around 431 A.D. In his attempts to convert the Celts, Patrick highlighted the many similarities between their beliefs and those of the Christian faith, such as the existence of an afterlife. Seeing the parallels, the Celts were easily converted. Their conversion brought to Christianity a perspective unlike that of the Romans.

That unique spiritual perspective still finds appeal to this day. With that in mind, our group examined the historical sites of Ireland within the context of four major themes of Celtic spirituality: pilgrimage, the immanent presence of God, monasticism and community, and art and symbolism.

## **In Search of Holiness**

As we embarked on our pilgrimage on a typically Irish “soft day,” complete with misty rain and moderate temperatures, we connected with the Celtic theme of pilgrimage. We too were pilgrims on a faith journey. Pilgrimage was a very important

aspect of Celtic spirituality, notes Sister John Miriam, adding that “pilgrimage is still very much alive in Ireland.

“Pilgrimage is always a search for God and God’s goodness,” she says. “True pilgrimage has to do with a change of heart. The outward journey serves to frame an inner journey: a journey of repentance and rebirth; a journey which seeks a deeper faith, greater holiness; a journey in search of God.”

For the early Christian monks, the concept of pilgrimage was closely tied with the Christian notion of penance. Monks would often embark on pilgrimages as a way of seeking out a place which would reveal God to them.

Celtic men and women soon took up the practice of pilgrimage as a means of discovering their own path to God. Along their way, pilgrims would leave tangible signs of their journey such as pilgrims’ stones, which are rudely fashioned crosses, or small mounds of stones called cairns. The stones represented either a prayer or the completion of the pilgrimage.

Round towers, found throughout Ireland, also played a vital role in pilgrimages. The towers, which are believed to have served a number of purposes including serving as bell towers and as places of refuge during attacks, can be seen for miles. They would have provided pilgrims with direction and inspiration to complete their journey.

How does this Celtic notion of pilgrimage translate in 21st-century terms? Grace Szubski, a fellow pilgrimage member and lawyer from Brecksville, Ohio, notes that “the Celtic pilgrims were searching for a deeper faith and an inner peace with God. All these centuries later, we, too, are on that same quest. Retreats, religious shrines and World Youth Days are just some examples of our spiritual journey with God in the 21st century.”

### **Finding God in the 'Thin Places'**

Traveling through Ireland, as the ancient pilgrims would have, offers an excellent opportunity to experience one of the other major themes of Celtic spirituality: the immanent presence of God, which means that God is everywhere.

For Celtic Christians, God was a key part of all things natural and beautiful. Whereas the ancient Celts worshiped pagan gods for nearly every natural setting, Celtic Christians praised God’s design and creation of all things natural. “The hills, the sky, the sea, the forests were not God, but their spiritual qualities revealed God and were connected to God,” Sister John Miriam explains.

Places where people feel most strongly connected with God’s presence are referred to as “thin places.” It is in these places where the seen and unseen worlds are most closely connected and inhabitants of both worlds can momentarily touch the other. “For us, then, it is a place where it is possible to touch and be touched by God, as well as the angels, saints and those who have died,” according to Sister John Miriam.

The land of Ireland seems to have endless “thin places.” As author Steve Rabey says in his book, *In the House of Memory: Ancient Celtic Wisdom for Everyday Life*, thin

places for the ancient Celts could be sacred natural landscapes or “holy places of human construction.”

For anyone looking around the Irish landscape, locating a thin place in nature seems rather simple. The abundance of beauty makes it easy to recognize God’s imprint and presence. The ruggedness of the Cliffs of Moher, waves of purple rhododendron, vast fields of green and forest-like settings throughout Ireland all seem to convey the idea that God is near at hand.

For Jean Kotzbauer, who was in Ireland for the first time, the beauty was almost overwhelming. “I’ve heard so much about Ireland and seen pictures of how beautiful it is, but to really see and experience it gives you a whole new understanding and appreciation,” she says.

One example of a human-constructed thin place is Newgrange, an ancient passage tomb located in the Boyne Valley. Knowth and Dowth, two smaller burial tombs, are also located in this area but are not open to visitors.

These burial tombs, which predate Stonehenge and the pyramids, were constructed so that every year on December 21—the shortest day of the year—light would enter a small opening above the entrance and illuminate the passageway and center room of the burial tomb for 17 minutes. The appearance of light in the chamber during the winter months would reaffirm for the Celts that summer would again come, just as there would be life after death. Today, there is a 10-year waiting list to witness on December 21 this spectacular feat of engineering and faith.

### **Experiencing God in Community**

As our group explored and celebrated Celtic spirituality, we gained an appreciation for the Celtic Christians’ emphasis on community.

“The Celts seemed to have a natural disposition for community. The kinship they felt with the angels and saints was completed by their kinship with one another. Perhaps that is why life shared together in and around the monastery became the ordinary way in which Christian life was lived,” explains Sister John Miriam.

Solitary hermits developed many of these monastic communities. Others were then attracted to the communities by the monks’ holiness and the location of the monastic community, leading to the eventual growth of rather large monastic cities encompassing a variety of people seeking to express their faith through their own lives and work. From the sixth to the 12th century, these monastic cities flourished with religious and laity living and worshiping together.

During our pilgrimage we visited three of Ireland’s most famous monastic communities: Glendalough, Monasterboice and Clonmacnoise.

Monasterboice was founded in the sixth century by St. Buite. The monastery is most recognized for its exquisite High Crosses, especially Mueirdach’s Cross, which is the tallest High Cross in Ireland.

Glendalough, which means “The Valley of the Two Lakes,” was founded in the sixth century by St. Kevin. Following the establishment of the monastic city, St. Kevin retreated to a cave—known as St. Kevin’s Bed—by the upper lake where, according to legend, he lived to be 106. According to another legend, a woman appeared in St. Kevin’s cave to seduce him; he flung her over the cliff and into the lake below.

Clonmacnoise was a major center of religion, learning, trade, craftsmanship and political influence. It was founded around 548 A.D. by St. Ciarán and, because of its large lay population, actually resembled a town more than a monastery. It is also home to one of Ireland’s finest surviving High Crosses, the “Cross of the Scriptures.” The panels of the “Cross of the Scriptures” depict Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, with the center of the cross showing the risen Christ.

This theme of community came alive on the trip for Sister John Miriam, who was exploring Ireland with a large group for the first time. “People from many backgrounds seemed to coalesce well around our common Irish connections and the enjoyment of our common experience,” she says.

### **Artistic and Symbolic Expressions of Faith**

Celtic design is rather easily identified. Its intricacies and symbolism are an important expression of the faith and beliefs of the Celtic Christians. These designs can be seen in a broad range throughout Ireland, from the highly intricate artwork in the ninth-century Book of Kells to the craftsmanship of the High Crosses. The characteristic interweaving patterns and designs commonly found in Celtic artwork represent that “all things relate” and “all things are holy.”

Perhaps the most recognizable symbols of Celtic spirituality are Ireland’s more than 100 High Crosses. These imposing crosses stand anywhere from 10 to 15 feet tall, with each element of the cross serving as a symbol. For instance, the circle within the crossbar that is so identifiable with Celtic crosses is often interpreted as representing God’s continuing connection with life and earth.

The crosses evolved over the years from being primarily design-oriented in the seventh and eighth centuries to being more scriptural later. These scriptural crosses, often referred to as “Sermons in Stone,” helped illustrate important Christian concepts for preliterate Celts.

Many of the High Crosses have been damaged over the years from exposure to the elements. Some of the crosses have been relocated indoors for preservation purposes. Even those that remain in their original locations, however worn they may be, continue to symbolize the multifaceted aspects of Celtic spirituality.

In addition to the expression of faith in stone, the Book of Kells, which is on display at Trinity College in Dublin, is considered to be the greatest Irish work of art to have survived from the Middle Ages. The book was produced around the beginning of the ninth century by the monks of a monastery at Iona, a small island off the west coast of Scotland. The book contains a Latin text of the four Gospels, as well as intricate Celtic designs to illustrate the text, like large initial capital letters and page designs of animals and flowers. It was sent to Dublin in 1653 for safekeeping.

Celtic music, dance and literature are also outward expressions of the Celts' awareness of God's immanent presence. The popular Riverdance is a modern-day celebration of Celtic music and dance. And authors such as James Joyce, Frank McCourt and poet Seamus Heaney capture the essence of Celtic life through their writings.

### **Celtic Spirituality for the 21st Century**

Celtic spirituality can offer all of us—Irish or not—an important reminder not to abandon the past. Just as the Celtic Christians built upon the concepts of the ancient Celts, so too can we take this spirituality and make it our own.

Sister Marty Dermody, a photographer and videographer for the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati, Ohio, says the pilgrimage gave her a better understanding of Celtic spirituality. "It made the Celtic Christians come alive for me. I could very easily identify with their ideas of God at hand within their lives. I believe the Celts were a very spiritual people and I felt privileged to be able to have the time to experience their culture as we journeyed through the many places. I felt connected with them because of their recognition of God through nature. I felt touched by God in the misty, mystical places we toured, most especially at Glendalough."

St. Patrick himself offers a good summation of Celtic spirituality: "Christ, shield me this day: Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every person who thinks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me."

Traveling to Ireland offered a firsthand experience of the history of Celtic spirituality. It is unique, yet universal. Perhaps pilgrims see that best. As Sister John Miriam reminds us, "The thing that distinguishes a pilgrimage is what's in your heart and why you're doing it."

### **St. Patrick: Pastoral But Passionate**

"Ireland is unique in religious history for being the only land into which Christianity was introduced without bloodshed," writes Thomas Cahill in his book *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. St. Patrick deserves a great deal of credit for that honor. For while he was not the first to attempt conversion of the Celts to Christianity—a Christian bishop named Palladius holds that distinction—Patrick was successful at doing so.

And while Patrick is perhaps the best-known and -loved Irish saint, he actually was born about 389 A.D. in Roman Britain under the name Patricius. When he was a teenager, he was kidnapped and enslaved in Ireland where he worked as a shepherd for six years before escaping and returning to his homeland.

Much of what we do know about Patrick comes from his writings. His Confession details his call to convert the Irish to Christianity. In "Letter to Coroticus" Patrick addresses an Irish warlord and his soldiers who had snatched some recent Christian

converts to sell them into slavery, for which Patrick excommunicated them. Both provide us with insight into Patrick and his mission.

Exactly when he returned to Ireland is unknown, but when he did return, as they say, the rest is history. Patrick knew the Celtic people from his time of enslavement in Ireland. It is this knowledge that helped Patrick evangelize the Celts in a whole new way—unlike that of the Romans—and develop a unique type of Celtic Christianity. In his quest for conversion, Patrick was both pastoral and passionate, noting the similarities between the Celts’ pagan beliefs and the beliefs of Christianity, but at the same time firmly defending his Christian beliefs when he felt it necessary. Patrick died about 461.

As Steve Rabey says in *In the House of Memory*, “What Patrick gave the Irish was a faith that took the best of traditional pagan beliefs and redefined those in Christian terms. The Celtic Christians didn’t tear down and destroy the stone circles and monuments that had been around for ages, as some zealous preachers would do centuries later. Instead, they merely inscribed crosses on them alongside the pagan symbols.”

### **Practicing Celtic Spirituality In Our Lives**

When thinking of Celtic spirituality, it is often difficult to imagine its application apart from the land of its origin. There are, however, numerous ways in which we can incorporate these practices into our own lives right at home. Here are a few suggestions:

Embark on a pilgrimage—physically or spiritually. Remember that as Sister John Miriam points out, “The thing that distinguishes a pilgrimage is what’s in your heart.” Her book, *With An Eagle’s Eye: A Seven-day Sojourn in Celtic Spirituality* (Ave Maria Press), offers readers an opportunity to embark on a pilgrimage without leaving home, or it can serve as a guideline for an actual pilgrimage.

Locate a “thin place” where you feel especially connected with God and feel God’s presence. Perhaps it is at a cemetery where a loved one is buried or a favorite spot in nature.

The Celtic Christians found solace in community living. Celebrate the communities of which you are a part, whether they be your faith community, family or friends.

Most of us cannot begin to express ourselves artistically in ways such as the High Crosses or the Book of Kells. We can, however, use our individual talents to express our faith: Draw a picture or write a poem about something that strikes you as particularly representative of God’s beauty.

*Susan Hines-Brigger is an assistant editor of this publication and fourth-generation Irish-American. Her dad, Bob Hines, accompanied her on this trip.*

# The Northern Irish Conflict: A Chronology

## A history of the conflict and the slow progress towards peace

by Ann Marie Imbornoni, Borgna Brunner, and Beth Rowen

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### HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM: BRITAIN AND IRELAND

#### A Centuries-old Conflict

The history of Northern Ireland can be traced back to the 17th century, when the English finally succeeded in subduing the island after successfully putting down a number of rebellions. Much land, especially in the north, was subsequently colonized by Scottish and English Protestants, setting Ulster [ancient name for this region of the island] somewhat apart from the rest of Ireland, which was predominantly Catholic.



#### The Nineteenth Century

During the 1800s the north and south grew further apart due to economic differences. In the north the standard of living rose as industry and manufacturing flourished, while in the south the unequal distribution of land and resources—Anglican Protestants owned most of the land—resulted in a low standard of living for the large Catholic population.

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#### The Twentieth Century

Political separation of Northern Ireland from the rest of Ireland did not come until the early 20th century, when Protestants and Catholics divided into two warring camps over the issue of Irish home rule. Most Irish Catholics desired complete independence from Britain, but Irish Protestants feared living in a country ruled by a Catholic majority.

#### Government of Ireland Act

In an attempt to pacify both factions, the British passed in 1920 the Government of Ireland Act, which divided Ireland into two separate political entities, each with some powers of self-government. The Act was accepted by Ulster Protestants and rejected by southern Catholics, who continued to demand total independence for a unified Ireland.

## **The Irish Free State and Northern Ireland**

Following a period of guerrilla warfare between the nationalist Irish Republican Army (IRA) and British forces, a treaty was signed in 1921 creating the Irish Free State from 23 southern counties and 3 counties in Ulster. The other 6 counties of Ulster made up Northern Ireland, which remained part of the United Kingdom. In 1949 the Irish Free State became an independent republic.

### **"The Troubles"**

Although armed hostilities between Catholics and Protestants largely subsided after the 1921 agreement, violence erupted again in the late 1960s; bloody riots broke out in Londonderry in 1968 and in Londonderry and Belfast in 1969. British troops were brought in to restore order, but the conflict intensified as the IRA and Protestant paramilitary groups carried out bombings and other acts of terrorism. This continuing conflict, which lingered into the 1990s, became known as "the Troubles."

Despite efforts to bring about a resolution to the conflict during the 1970s and 80s, terrorist violence was still a problem in the early 90s and British troops remained in full force. More than 3,000 people have died as a result of the strife in Northern Ireland.

## **THE PEACE PROCESS**

### **An Early Attempt**

A serious attempt to bring about a resolution to the conflict was made in 1985 when British and Irish prime ministers Margaret Thatcher and Garrett Fitzgerald signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which recognized for the first time the Republic of Ireland's right to have a consultative role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. However, Protestant politicians who opposed the Agreement were able to block its implementation.

### **The IRA Declares a Cease-fire**

Further talks between rival Catholic and Protestant officials and the British and Irish governments occurred during the early 1990s. Then, in late Aug. 1994 the peace process received a big boost when the pro-Catholic IRA announced a cease-fire. This made it possible for Sinn Fein [pronounced like 'shin fain'], the political arm of the IRA, to participate in multiparty peace talks; hitherto Sinn Fein had been barred from such talks because of its association with the IRA and its terrorist tactics.

### **Sinn Fein Participates in Official Talks**

On Dec. 9, 1994, the first officially sanctioned, publicly announced talks took place between Sinn Fein and British officials. Negotiators for Sinn Fein pushed for a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland; Great Britain countered that the IRA must give up its weapons before Sinn Fein would be allowed to negotiate on the same basis as other parties. The issue of IRA disarmament would continue to be a sticking point throughout the negotiations.

### **An Anglo-Irish Proposal for Peace**

In late Feb. 1995, the British and Irish governments released their joint proposal for talks on the future of Northern Ireland. The talks were to be held in three phases involving the political parties of Northern Ireland, the Irish government, and the British government. The talks would focus on the establishment of a form of self-government for Northern Ireland and the formation of Irish-Northern Irish "cross-border" bodies that would be set up to oversee such domestic concerns as agriculture, tourism, and health. Results of the talks would be put to referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

## **The U.S. Gets Involved**

In Dec. 1995, former US senator George Mitchell was brought in to serve as mediator for the peace talks. His report issued in Jan. 1996 recommended the gradual disarmament of the IRA during the course of the talks, thus breaking the deadlock caused by the IRA's refusal to disarm.

## **Multiparty Talks Open in Belfast**

On June 10, 1996, multiparty peace talks opened in Belfast. However, because of the breakdown of the IRA cease-fire the preceding Feb., Sinn Fein was turned away. Following the resumption of the cease-fire in July 1997, full-scale peace negotiations began in Belfast on Oct. 7, 1997. Great Britain attended as well as most of Northern Ireland's feuding political parties, including Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the largest Protestant political party in Northern Ireland. The more extreme Democratic Unionist Party and the tiny United Kingdom Unionist Party refused to join.

## **Good Friday Agreement**

The historic talks finally resulted in the landmark Good Friday Agreement, which was signed by the main political parties on both sides on Apr. 10, 1998. The accord called for an elected assembly for Northern Ireland, a cross-party cabinet with devolved powers, and cross-border bodies to handle issues common to both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Thus minority Catholics gained a share of the political power in Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland a voice in Northern Irish affairs. In return Catholics were to relinquish the goal of a united Ireland unless the largely Protestant North voted in favor of it.

## **Real Hope for Peace**

With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, hope ran high that lasting peace was about to become a reality in Northern Ireland. In a dual referendum held on May 22, 1998, Northern Ireland approved the accord by a vote of 71% to 29%, and the Irish Republic by a vote of 94%. In June 1998, voters chose the 108 members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the locally elected government.

International recognition and support for peace in Northern Ireland came on Oct. 16, 1998, when the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to John Hume and David Trimble, the leaders of the largest Catholic and Protestant political parties, respectively, in Northern Ireland.

## **Hope Proves False**

In June 1999, the peace process stalled when the IRA refused to disarm prior to the formation of Northern Ireland's new provincial cabinet. Sinn Fein insisted that the IRA would only give up weapons after the new government assembled; the Ulster Unionists, Northern Ireland's largest Protestant party, demanded disarmament first. Consequently the new government failed to form on schedule in July 1999, bringing the entire process to a complete halt.

## **Sinn Fein, Over to You**

At the end of Nov. 1999, David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionists, relented on the "no guns, no government" position and agreed to form a government before the IRA's disarmament. If the IRA did not begin to disarm by Jan. 31, 2000, however, the Ulster Unionists would withdraw from the parliament of Northern Ireland, shutting down the new government.

## **New Parliament Is Suspended**

With this compromise in place, the **new government** was quickly formed, and on Dec. 2 the British government formally **transferred** governing powers over to the Northern Irish parliament. But by the

deadline Sinn Fein had made little progress toward disarmament, and so on Feb. 12, 2000, the British government suspended the Northern Irish parliament and once again imposed **direct rule**.

## A New Beginning

Throughout the spring, Irish, British, and American leaders continued to hold discussions to try to end the impasse. Then on May 6 the IRA announced that it would agree to put its arms "**beyond use**" under the supervision of international inspectors. Britain returned home rule powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly on May 30, just three days after the **Ulster Unionist Party**, Northern Ireland's largest Protestant Party, again voted in favor of a power-sharing arrangement with Sinn Fein.

On June 26, 2000, international monitors Martti Ahtisaari of Finland and Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa announced that they were satisfied that a **substantial amount** of IRA arms was safely stored and could not be used without detection.

However, while the IRA did allow for the inspection of some of its arms dumps, the months limped by without any real progress on disarmament. Caught in the middle was David Trimble, who was accused by his fellow Protestants of making too many concessions to the Republicans. On Oct. 28, 2000, he was nearly ousted by his own party, a move that surely would have spelled the end for the Good Friday Agreement. But Trimble survived, pledging to get tough by imposing sanctions on Sinn Fein.

## STALEMATE

### Into 2001, Still No Major Progress

Through the first months of 2001, Catholics and Protestants remained at odds, especially over the establishment of a neutral police force in Northern Ireland and IRA disarmament. In early March 2001, the IRA unexpectedly initiated a new round of talks with Northern Ireland's disarmament commission, but no real progress was made.

### Trimble Resigns

Shortly before Britain's general election on June 7, Northern Ireland's first minister **David Trimble announced that he would resign** on July 1 if the IRA did not start disarming. The announcement helped bolster his position among his constituents, and Trimble managed to hold on to his seat in the British Parliament. However, his pro-British Ulster Unionist Party fared badly overall. In the weeks that followed, the IRA took no steps to dismantle its arsenal, and Trimble resigned as planned.

### Violence Renewed as Marching Season Begins

The fragile peace process faced another crisis in mid-June when sectarian violence broke out again in Belfast. The clashes began after a group of schoolgirls and their parents were stoned by Protestant youths as they left a Catholic primary school. In what was deemed the worst rioting in several years, rival mobs hurled gasoline bombs, stones, and bottles and set fire to cars. The violence coincided with the start of the annual "marching season" when Protestant groups commemorate past victories on the battlefield against the Catholics.

### IRA's Offer to Disarm Rejected

On Aug. 6, 2001, the commission responsible for the disarming of paramilitary forces in Northern Ireland announced that the IRA had agreed to a method of permanently placing its weapons arsenal beyond use. Although the commission did not disclose any details or indicate when disarmament might begin, Britain and the Republic of Ireland hailed the plan as a historic breakthrough. Protestant leaders in Northern Ireland were less enthusiastic and rejected the proposal as falling too short of action.

On Aug. 11, Britain's secretary of state for Northern Ireland, John Reid, suspended the power-sharing government for one day, a move that allowed Protestant and Catholic politicians six more weeks to negotiate before British authorities would be required to call for new elections to the assembly. (In the event of new elections, moderate David Trimble stood little chance of being reelected, since Protestants as well as Catholics have become increasingly opposed to the Good Friday Agreement.)

The IRA withdrew its offer to disarm on Aug. 14, but veterans of the process were confident that the matter remained on the negotiating table.

## **Northern Ireland Government Suspended Again**

With some small progress having been made on policing and arms decommissioning, Britain suspended the devolved government again on Sept. 22, creating another six-week window for the parties to resolve their differences. The move was criticized by UUP leader David Trimble, and on Oct. 18, the three remaining Ulster Unionist cabinet ministers resigned, in an attempt to force Britain to impose direct rule again indefinitely.

However, on Oct. 23, the IRA announced that it had begun to disarm, and it appeared that the peace process had once again been rescued from the point of collapse. Guns and explosives at two arms dumps were put beyond use.

Trimble regained his position as first minister in the power-sharing government in a vote rerun on Nov. 6, after narrowly losing his reelection bid in the initial vote a few days earlier. Mark Durkan, who succeeded John Hume as leader of the largely Catholic SDLP (Nov. 10), was elected deputy first minister.

## **IRA Scraps More Weapons**

On April 8, 2002, international weapons inspectors announced that the IRA had put more stockpiled munitions beyond use. The move was welcomed by British and Irish leaders alike, who expressed the hope that Protestant guerilla groups would also begin to surrender their weapons.

However, in mid-June British and Irish political leaders called for emergency talks to try to stem the rising tide of violence that had been ongoing in Belfast for several weeks. Police believed that the nightly outbreaks of firebombing and rioting were being organized by Protestant and Catholic paramilitary groups in direct violation of standing cease-fire agreements. The street disturbances continued into July, and a 19-year-old Catholic man was shot—the first death caused by sectarian violence since January.

## **IRA Members Arrested in Colombia**

The call for talks also came hard on the heels of a BBC report concerning three IRA members who had been arrested in Aug. 2001, in Bogota, Colombia. According to the BBC, one of the men involved in the weapons activity was Brian Keenan, the IRA representative charged with disarming the guerilla group in Ireland. The three Irish guerillas were accused of testing new weaponry and teaching bomb-making techniques to Colombian rebels. They were scheduled to go on trial in Colombia in July.

Also in July, during the annual Orange Order parade through Portadown, Northern Ireland, Protestant supporters of the Orangemen hurled stones and bricks to protest the ban on marching down Garvaghy Road, past a Catholic enclave in the town. Throughout Northern Ireland, members of the Orange Order march to celebrate the military victory of Protestant King William of Orange over the Catholics in 1690. Two dozen police officers were injured and several people were arrested.

## **IRA Apologizes for Deaths**

On July 16, 2002, the IRA issued its first apology to the families of the 650 civilians killed by the IRA since the late 1960s. The apology was released several days before the 30th anniversary of the IRA's Bloody Friday attack on July 21, 1972, which left 9 people dead and some 130 injured. During the attack in Belfast, 22 bombs exploded during a period of only 75 minutes.

## **Trimble Threatens to Resign Again**

In late Sept. 2002, First Minister David Trimble announced that he and other Unionist leaders would force the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly by resigning unless the IRA disbanded by Jan. 18, 2003. The ultimatum came under pressure from hard-line constituents within the Unionist Party, following a number of incidents (including the trial of IRA guerillas in Colombia on weapons-related charges) that pointed to continued IRA military activity.

## **Britain Suspends Home-Rule Government Again**

By early October, the situation had deteriorated, with Trimble threatening immediate mass resignation unless the British threw Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, out of the Assembly. The discovery of an alleged I.R.A. spy operation within the Northern Ireland Assembly was the last straw. Britain's Northern Ireland secretary, John Reid, suspended the power-sharing government on Oct. 14, 2002. It was the fourth time the British government had had to take back political control of Northern Ireland since the Northern Ireland Assembly came into being in Dec. 1999.

On Oct. 30, in response to the British move to impose direct rule again, the IRA suspended contact with the arms inspectors who were overseeing the disarmament of Northern Ireland's guerilla and paramilitary groups. The Council on Foreign relations has estimated that Protestant paramilitary groups have been responsible for 30% of the civilian deaths in the Northern Irish conflict. The two main Protestant vigilante groups are the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Strongest during the 1970s, their ranks have diminished since then. While Protestant paramilitaries have observed a cease-fire since the IRA declared one, none of these groups has made any moves toward surrendering their weapons as stipulated by the Good Friday Accord.

## **Showdown in 2003**

In March and April 2003, negotiations were again underway to reinstate the Northern Ireland assembly. But Sinn Fein's vague language, weakly pledging that its "strategies and disciplines will not be inconsistent with the Good Friday Agreement caused Tony Blair to challenge Sinn Fein to once and for all make a clear, unambiguous pledge to renounce paramilitary for political means." According to the *New York Times* (April 24, 2003), "virtually every newspaper in Britain and Ireland has editorialized in favor of full disarmament, and the Irish government, traditionally sympathetic to Sinn Fein, is almost as adamant about the matter as London is."

In Nov. 2003 legislative elections, the Ulster Unionists and other moderates lost out to Northern Ireland's extremist parties: Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists and Sinn Fein. The prospect of power-sharing between these antithetical parties looked dim.

## **Deadlocked in 2004**

An effort to revive the deadlocked powersharing negotiations was broached in March 2004 by Tony Blair and Ireland's Bertie Ahern, who announced, "The elections were in November, this is March, we must move on." In Sept. 2004, another round of talks, aimed at ending the impasse, broke up with no significant progress. A \$50 million bank robbery in Dec. 2004 was linked to the IRA, although Sinn Fein has denied the connection. Sinn Fein's growing acceptance as a political organization suffered a severe setback as a result, putting power-sharing negotiations on hold indefinitely. Evidence of the

IRA's criminality as well as its continual refusal to give up its weapons has strained its relations not only in Northern Ireland and Britain but in the Republic of Ireland as well.

## **Violence and Vigilantism in 2005**

The brutal murder on Jan. 31, 2005, of Belfast Catholic Robert McCartney by the IRA, and the campaign by his five sisters to hold the IRA accountable, further diminished the IRA's standing, even in Catholic communities that had once been IRA strongholds. The IRA's subsequent offer to kill the men responsible generated further outrage. Instead of inviting Northern Irish political parties to the White House—the custom for the past several years—the U.S. invited the McCartney sisters instead.

## **Real Hope in July 2005**

On July 28, the IRA stated that it was entering a new era in which it would unequivocally renounce violence: The statement said that IRA members have been "instructed to assist the development of purely political and democratic programs through exclusively political means," and that "all I.R.A. units have been ordered to dump arms" and "to complete the process to verifiably put its arms beyond use."

## **Delays in 2006**

In Feb. 2006, the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC), a watchdog agency monitoring Northern Irish paramilitary groups, reported that although the IRA "seems to be moving in the right direction," dissident republican paramilitaries are still engaged in violence and crime.

On May 15th, Northern Ireland's political parties were given six months (to Nov. 24) to come up with a power-sharing government or else sovereignty will be revert indefinitely to the British government. In October, a report by the Independent Monitoring Commission in Northern Ireland indicated that the IRA had definitively ceased all paramilitary activity and declared that "the IRA's campaign is over."

## **Milestone Meeting in 2007**

Shortly after parliamentary elections in March 2007, Gerry Adams, the leader of Sinn Fein, and Rev. Ian Paisley, the head of the Democratic Unionist Party, met face to face for the first time and hashed out an agreement for a power-sharing government.

## **Former Enemies Resume Power-Sharing Government**

Local government was restored to Northern Ireland in May 2007 as Rev. Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionists, and Martin McGuinness, of Sinn Fein, were sworn in as leader and deputy leader, respectively, of the Northern Ireland executive government, thus ending direct rule from London. "I believe we are starting on a road to bring us back to peace and prosperity," said Paisley. British Prime Minister Tony Blair praised the historic deal. "Look back, and we see centuries marked by conflict, hardship, even hatred among the people of these islands," he said. "Look forward, and we see the chance to shake off those heavy chains of history."

On Feb. 5, 2010, with the signing of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, Gordon Brown, prime minister of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, and Brian Cowen, the Taoiseach of Ireland, respectively, created a breakthrough in the Northern Ireland peace process. According to the terms of the accord, Britain will hand over control of the six counties' police and justice system to Northern Ireland. The shift to local control of the courts, prosecution system, and police has been the most important and contentious of the issues plaguing the tenuous power-sharing government. The agreement passed its first test on March 9, when the Northern Ireland Assembly voted its support 88-17, setting the stage for the April 12 power transfer deadline. "For the first time, we can look forward to policing and justice powers being exercised by democratic institutions on a cross-community basis in Northern Ireland," Cowen said.

## **Doug Baker – Presbyterian Church (USA) Missionary**

**Doug Baker** has been under appointment as a PC(USA) mission worker since 1979 and Elaine Baker since 1985. Though their roles have changed over the years of their ministry in Northern Ireland, their ministry has always served the cause of peacemaking and reconciliation.



In 2005 Doug was asked to serve as regional liaison for Ireland and the United Kingdom. In this role, he facilitates Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) support for programs, relationships and activities involving partner denominations and agencies. This includes facilitating exchanges and work and study visits involving PC(USA)-related groups.



Doug continues in the role of site coordinator for the PC(USA)'s Young Adult Volunteer program in Northern Ireland. Young Adult Volunteers serve in communities of need at sites in the United States and internationally. In Northern Ireland their roles include work with at-risk young people through youth clubs, drop-in centers and tutoring programs, work with women's and senior citizen's groups and work assisting congregations to develop youth fellowship and other ministries. The volunteers get together regularly for reflection, prayer and community-building led by Doug, the program coordinator.

Besides his responsibilities as a regional liaison and YAV site coordinator, Doug continues to work as a consultant, facilitator and trainer with the Irish churches as they develop peace-building initiatives. From 2001 to 2005 Doug co-led Partners in Transformation, a time-limited joint initiative of the Irish School of Ecumenics and Mediation Northern Ireland, whose aim was to enhance, nurture and support the capacity of the Irish churches in their calling to be peace builders and agents of transformation.

From 1997 to 2001 he was development officer with Mediation Northern Ireland, working primarily with the churches sector.

From 1979 to 1997 he was Christian education coordinator for the Corrymeela Community, a dispersed ecumenical community with membership drawn from both Catholic and Protestant churches in Ireland and committed to a ministry of reconciliation across social, political and religious divisions. In that position Doug supported the development of interchurch initiatives and cross-community encounter programs through which he established a broad base of contacts that has provided a strong foundation for his subsequent ministry.

Having been invited to take up recognized ministerial status in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Doug served as convener of the Race Relations Committee from 1993-99 and the Peacemaking Committee from 1999-2006. He now coordinates its Conciliation Panel and training.

“In spite of tremendous natural beauty, friendly people, and major contributions to science and industry,” writes Doug, “Northern Ireland is primarily known for its tragic history of sectarian violence. Since 1969 the ‘Troubles’ have claimed over 3800 lives. Thousands more have been injured, bereaved, left unemployed or been forced to move house as a result of intimidation.

“In 1994 Republican and Loyalist terror groups in Northern Ireland declared cease-fires, opening the way for multi-party talks. On Good Friday, 1998, eight regional political parties and the British and Irish governments reached an agreement on future structures for governing Northern Ireland.

“In referenda the majority of voters in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland endorsed this ‘Belfast Agreement.’ Elections to a new devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland and the setting-up of a power-sharing executive followed. Some paramilitary groups have also engaged in acts of decommissioning illegal weapons.

“This devolved Assembly was suspended on several occasions, when trust between parties broke down. However, an historic agreement in March 2007 between Northern Ireland’s two largest parties, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, paved the way for devolved power-sharing government to be restored. Deep disagreement and profound difficulties in finding agreed ways to deal with the past remain. Much else is also required to build a lasting peace. The healing process will still take many years.”

Doug graduated from the University of Washington in Seattle in 1972 and received his Master of Divinity degree in 1976 from Princeton Theological Seminary. He served as associate pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, until his appointment to Ireland. Doug is a clergy member of the Presbytery of Donegal. Doug and his wife, Elaine, are the parents of three children, Niall, Fiona and Stephen.

### **A letter from Doug and Elaine Baker in Northern Ireland**

April 2011

For several years now the economic outlook in both the United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland has been becoming increasingly gloomy and their populations are having to come to terms with new realities. While there are local reasons for the challenges facing the economy in each of these jurisdictions, this is also part of the worldwide recession.

#### **The United Kingdom**

After the United Kingdom general elections held in May 2010 Labour was replaced by a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition, promising big cuts in spending to deal with the deficit racked up over many years — including those when Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party were in power before Labour came into office. VAT, the value-added tax (similar to sales tax in the United States), has increased from 15 to 20 percent and inflation generally is outpacing any rise in income for most people. Each government department is being asked to shave up to 25 percent off its budget. It looks like a lean next few years for spending on education, health and

infrastructure. Unemployment is on the rise overall, and young people — including recent university graduates — are finding it particularly difficult to get into the workforce at all, let alone in fields for which they have been trained. At the same time, tuition charges for university and other forms of higher education are rising dramatically, making many question whether it is worth racking up significant debts when the prospects of employment at the end of a course are not good.

### Northern Ireland

The implication of all of this for the Northern Ireland peace process is not major, but there are at least three ways in which it does have an impact: First, the power-sharing Northern Ireland Executive from the outset has had difficulty in reaching agreement on spending priorities, and major decisions about this have tended to be shelved. The reduction in the overall budget available does not make finding agreement on this any easier and the necessity of doing so could exacerbate areas of disagreement between the various parties.

Second, higher unemployment and less hopeful indicators about the economic future always lead to frustration, particularly among the young in more economically disadvantaged areas. Disillusionment in settings where the promised “peace dividend” in terms of economic well-being has not been experienced as hoped for can be a trigger for either condoning or actual engagement in violence by extreme groups who never supported the political settlement inherent in the Northern Ireland peace process.

Third, reduced local job prospects for graduates feeds the brain drain as more head away from Northern Ireland to pursue options elsewhere. While there is not a direct correlation, it is often true that those who have qualified for professional roles also hold more moderate political outlooks. The kind of leaders Northern Ireland needs.

### The Republic of Ireland

It is the Republic of Ireland that has experienced the biggest decline in its economy. The Republic had traveled a long way in just a few decades from a largely agricultural economy to the high-tech and consumer-driven Celtic Tiger that impressed the whole world. House prices rocketed by over 500 percent during the boom years. People got carried away with prosperity. However, wild property speculation and crazy bank loans resulted in an exaggerated picture of prosperity. Those who should have been regulating borrowing and spending failed to recognize or respond to warning signs. It would appear that there was a collective state of denial. Eventually the bubble burst and there was no denying the magnitude of the economic crisis facing the Republic. In late 2010 the government had to turn to the European Central Bank and others for an 85-billion-euro (\$110 billion) bailout. Following a resulting internal crisis within the ruling Fianna Fail Party and the withdrawal from the coalition government by the Green Party, a general election was called for February 2011.

Voters were angry about the economy and voted for change. Fianna Fail was crushed. They lost three-quarters of their TDs (members of parliament); the Green Party, who had been their coalition partners, lost all six of their seats. Fianna Fail received their biggest endorsement in history, and the smaller Labour Party increased their vote

from 10 percent to 20 percent. Fianna Gael and Labour formed a coalition with 116 of 166 seats in the Dail.

Sinn Fein increased its vote from 7 percent to 10 percent and tripled its number of TDs, including a victory for Gerry Adams, the party's president, who resigned from his Westminster and Northern Ireland Assembly seats to stand as a TD for Louth. While there is no question Sinn Fein increased its vote significantly, commentators view many of those votes as being 'on loan' from Fianna Fail, a party voters wished to punish for negligence during their watch of the economy. The general election is being called a democratic revolution — not on the streets but in the ballot boxes. The new Taoiseach is Enda Kenny of Fianna Gael, who along with his Labour coalition colleagues has enjoyed no honeymoon period and has had to identify huge areas in which to cut public spending as well as attempt to renegotiate repayment of the bailout for the country secured by Fianna Fail prior to the election.

A November 2010 editorial in the Irish Times declared, "Having obtained independence from Britain we have now surrendered our sovereignty to the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund." The major challenge for the victors in the Republic's general election will be finding sufficient wriggle room with the IMF/ECB/EU to renegotiate the bailout conditions. It is obvious to the vast majority of people within Ireland, the markets and Europe that the Republic's economy is simply not big enough to repay the debt. Unless measures are taken by Europe to help shoulder bondholder debt, it appears likely that it is only a question of when, not if, Ireland will default.

Outer signs of wealth are still there to be seen in the Republic of Ireland, but everywhere there are also reminders of the boom years that have gone bust and of mad development. These include empty office blocks, warehouses and hotels. However, the most telling reminders are the Republic's ghost estates: housing developments intended for the thousands of young adults who were not emigrating as in previous generations but staying in Ireland to work and the thousands of new arrivals from Eastern Europe and further afield drawn to Ireland because of the plentiful employment opportunities. They were built with tax incentives and cheap loans from financial institutions that have turned out to be unstable. These "ghost estate" housing developments are dotted around the Republic — 2,800 of them comprising over 43,000 units. Some have been half constructed and then left in that unfinished state. Others have been finished, but no units sold. Others have perhaps one house in five occupied, while others lie vacant and the roads and other amenities unfinished.

Individuals, families and businesses continue to suffer. Irish emigration stands at 1,000 people per week. Low- and middle-income families are feeling the disproportionate pain of a universal levy on their paychecks (this on top of the tax raises and welfare cuts, including the reduction of the minimum wage by €1, and negative equity). As it becomes ever more obvious that a worker is working to pay the interest on the bank bailout and to recompense the financial gamblers for betting and losing, it is little wonder that emigration is seen as a brighter alternative.

It would be fair to say that the Irish population has moved from a sanguine acceptance of their national plight to a simmering resentment of the authority structures and

golden circle they hold responsible. The general election saw a realignment of Irish politics, which had been centered on factions formed in the civil war that followed the partition of Ireland in 1920. Fianna Fail (Soldiers of Destiny), which was founded in 1926 by the antitreaty leader Eamon de Valera after breaking with the hardline Sinn Fein (Ourselves Alone), had been dominant since 1932. Fine Gael (Tribe of the Irish) grew out of the protreaty group led by Michael Collins.

The question of Northern Ireland and future Irish unity featured nowhere in this election. It was all about the economy. However, there are clear implications for the Northern Ireland economy, given that the Republic is its largest trading partner.

### Northern Ireland Security Update

Since the Belfast Friday Agreement of 1998, the security situation in Northern Ireland has improved immeasurably. The Provisional IRA and the main loyalist terrorist groups have called an end to their campaigns, and their weapons have been decommissioned under an internationally monitored process. In recent years, however, dissident republican groups in Northern Ireland — such as the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA, who continued to oppose the peace process — have grown stronger. Given the understandable focus on Al Qaeda-inspired terrorism in recent years, much less attention has been given to such groups in world news.

However, in the government's National Strategic Defence and Security Review, published in October 2010, "residual terrorism linked to Northern Ireland" was identified as a Tier One risk to national security: "There is a calculated campaign of violence from small Dissident Republican groups. Despite continuing political progress, their activities have increased in the last 18 months and the security situation is unlikely to improve in the short term. There were around 50 attacks in 2010 compared with 22 in all of 2009. The ongoing recruitment of experienced terrorists and a younger generation will contribute to a continued high level of threat in Northern Ireland, as well as in Great Britain, where the threat level was recently raised from Moderate to Substantial, meaning that an attack is a strong possibility." Dr. Martyn Frampton has published an important monograph about the history of dissident Irish Republicanism in all its forms, called *Legion of the Rear Guard: Dissident Irish Republicanism* (Irish Academic Press: Dublin, 2010). The aim of this pamphlet is to offer insight into the current security situation. It provides a timeline of dissident activity, an introduction to each dissident group, examines the relationships they have with each other and asks what their aims are. Drawing on the expert testimony of former security service personnel, Dr. Frampton looks at some of the problems faced by those whose job it is to deal with the threat — in a greatly altered security environment — and discusses possible responses to the revival of violent republicanism. (See our March 2011 Mission Connections letter about the death of Constable Ronan Kerr, most likely carried out by dissidents.)

Both the economy and the increased worry about dissident violence will feature in the outcome of elections on May 5 for both the Northern Ireland Assembly and local District Councils.

Doug Baker

## News from Moses, Young Adult Volunteer Belfast, Northern Ireland

*Phil 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

As my time continues I have learned that “expecting the unexpected” is what makes life so interesting and worth living for Jesus Christ. During my time here things have not gone as I thought they would, which has been at times hard and confusing. That being said, it goes to show that God still has plan for me here and I will have to lean on and trust Him more than ever to help guide me through times of certainty and uncertainty. In this issue I will again share some journal entries, which I hope you enjoy. God is still, good and there and I am very thankful.

A recent note from one of you said: “We would love to hear what your typical day is like, what the church that you attend is like, and any other information that you would like to share when you have some time.” There is really no such thing as a typical day since my schedule varies from day to day. But I can give you an idea of a typical week.

On a **Monday** we usually have a YAV meeting with the coordinator and volunteers. We are basically going over certain things like the history of the country, where things are in terms of sectarianism of Catholics and Protestants and things like that. After the meeting I go to work at this Christian non- profit organization called 174 Trust. There I play soccer and go swimming from 4pm-9pm with the youth from ages 8-14. Then I go home and cook my dinner, if it is not provided while I’m doing the activities with the children.

On **Tuesday**, my time is split between the church and The 174 Trust. In the morning I go to Art Club at the church from 10-12. In the art club I basically just draw freely and talk to people, which for me is the ideal way of running an art class. It is ideal because I have the freedom to express myself more in my art, instead of feeling so confined. In the class a painter comes in to help the elders with the pieces they make. He has been trying to get me to paint or draw particular things but I don’t really want to, just because I’ve done it for so long in my college career of art. During the art club there is a tea break which is nice so everyone can get a chance to catch up. This is my first time to be in a art club and I’m really enjoying it. So after the class sometimes I go to a staff meeting with the Pastor, assistant pastor and another person who does pastoral work. There I listen to the various issues in the church and help take the tea and biscuits. It isn’t too exciting but gives me a chance to learn more about the church which is something I need to learn more about. It is one thing to be raised around a church, but it is another to actually know about it and how it runs. The meetings are generally twice a month.

After the meeting I usually go home for lunch, with this elder couple who have basically taken me in as one of their own. There I get to chill out and talk about certain things that I would talk about when I’m comfortable around people who want to listen and see how I’m really doing. After lunch I go back to 174 Trust to an after- school program from 2:30pm-5:00pm. There, I look after the children and help out with certain tasks. After that I go back to where I’m staying for dinner and chill out for the rest of the evening. While I’m reflecting over the day I usually talk to my girlfriend on g- mail or do some graphic art.

On **Wednesday** I go to the 174 Trust early in the morning to work in the nursery at 9:30am-1pm. There I basically do the same as in the after-school program in terms of just watching the kids, except I can't really play with them like I do with the after school kids, because they are so much younger (babies really). In both of my jobs my co-workers are females which can get kind of overwhelming in the sense of me being the only guy, but they are all great to be around and work with and make me feel a part of things. The thing I most enjoy about being in the nursery is seeing the children and how they interact with each other. It really makes me dream of having my own one day. Plus being around them helps me see the significance of what the Bible talks about in being like a "child" to enter in the kingdom of God. After my work in the nursery I go for lunch break back to where I live. Then I go back at 2:30 pm for the after-school program the same as on Tuesday. Wednesday is usually my longest day. Once I'm done with after school I go back to where I live for a short while. Then I take the bus to go back to church for the evening to help set up for this program called "parents and toddlers". My job there is setting up for the event by taking the toys out and tables out. In doing that there is usually help from people from the church. Then once all of that is done I go to a small group which meets twice a month. In the small group we are going through a program with Rob Bell and discussing it as a group. It is nice to be part of that in sharing my thoughts and hearing others in their spiritual journey. The nice thing about small group is that it is a nice way of ending the day off by keeping our minds focused on God despite all the stuff around us. Once it is over I go back to where I live usually by someone in the church giving me a lift which is very nice.

On **Thursday** I go back to the church for the "parents and toddlers" program which consists of me talking to the mothers while their kids play, and helping people in the kitchen. My role is helping pour the tea for some of the mothers during tea time. I's kind of intimidating talking to the mothers because I'm not a parent yet and don't really know what to talk about. But I have been asking God to give me courage and confidence to speak to people whenever I get the chance. So if you need an idea about what to be praying for me, that is one of them. The goal of the project is a way for the church to reach out to the community, giving mothers a break and bringing mothers of both sides together. After all of that is done I help with cleaning up the event which is held in the church hall. Then I go to lunch sometimes with the assistant pastor and his family which is nice to get away from all the noise. The thing is I don't really like being around lots of people for long periods of time. I just tend to get exhausted after a while. After lunch I go back to church to take part in helping host an older women's fellowship group. In there I just basically help take small food and cups of tea on a tray to the women. I feel like a new penny there, but it is something that I wanted to be a part of when I came here. Being around elders is something that I really enjoy, partly because of the time I've spent being around my grandparents. The amount of wisdom I can take in from their experiences in life is something that is priceless. The event was started up by this lovely widow who is a great example to others in her faith in the Lord. She is like a voice to other women, getting them to believe that they still have a part to play in mission despite their age. The event overlaps with my time with 174 Trust so I have to leave early to catch the bus. Once I get there I basically do the same as on Mondays with the youth except we only play soccer since we meet from 4:30pm-6:30pm. It is fun being part of change through the "world's game". Then I go back to where I live and have the rest of the evening doing what I usually do.

On **Friday** I'm off for most of the day until the evening when I go for this sort of children group thing which I don't really do anything except watch the kids but that will get sorted out soon. It is like a Bible club in a way where the kids do different activities like crafts and games. Then they listen to a Bible story. I'm hoping to get more involved with the boys in doing different activities suited more for the boys. At the moment it is something that is to be discussed in the next committee meeting so it is all in God's hands till then. After that I go back to where I live and then just hang out and do my thing.

On **Saturday** I have the day off until the evening sometimes when I was involved with this project that came to be called Hot Chocolate. The point of the project was to minister to youth who walk around the streets at night, by serving hot chocolate and marshmallows. I would go there twice a month from 7:30pm-8:30 pm. But it has stopped for the present, because it was not well advertised and fewer youth are actually on the street near the church or are interested in coming in. Hopefully with some new energy and creativity more children will come around and then the project can start up again next year.

On **Sunday** I go to church in the morning from 11am-12:30pm. After church I go either go back to where I live or eat with some family in the church, which is nice. The church I go to is sort of like some traditional churches in the States, but it has some contemporary feel to it occasionally, in the ways of worship. One thing I've noticed here is that church seems to be more about people being the church rather than the building. It would be nice to see both perspectives combined because the buildings here are kind of old, more of a meeting house and simpler looking, rather than being beautifully designed and comfortable like I've been to in the States.

Well that's about it in terms of my typical week and what my church is like. I have been asking God to give me courage and confidence to speak to people whenever I get the chance. So if you need an idea about what to be praying for me, that is one of them.

### ***About The 174 Trust***

Established in 1982 by a group of concerned Christians (including members of two local churches (Duncairn Presbyterian and Antrim Road Baptist), the Trust purchased premises at 174 Antrim Road. The Trust incorporated the address into its name since the physical location became the nucleus of work dedicated to tackling many of the problems confronting the local community. The Trust soon opened the Salt Shaker Cafe and began addressing the real needs of those living in a materially and socially disadvantaged area. Our mission is to effect change in North Belfast by social action and community development so that North Belfast would become a place of co-operation, prosperity and hope.

The 174 Trust is a non-denominational Christian organization that facilitates a variety of essential community projects in North Belfast. Located in the New Lodge community, the Trust offers opportunities and assistance to people of all ages. The 174 Trust is committed to a process of community development based on building relationships with local people, working together to identify and meet local needs. Our value base - the heart of our work and witness - is the proclamation of the kingdom of God through demonstrating Christ's values in action.