

# First stones laid for Galway mosque

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FOUNDATION stones for Galway's first purpose-built mosque have been laid by international and national leaders of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

The Masjid Maryum (Mary Mosque) will be open to "all worshippers of all faiths" when it is built in Ballybrit, the Irish Ahmadiyya Muslim chapter said last night.

Ahmadiyya Muslim world leader His Holiness, Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad laid the first of a number of stones at the Galway site yesterday evening with his wife, Begum Sahiba.

Several hours earlier, the caliph delivered a sermon which was broadcast worldwide from Galway to his international community.

Ahmadi Muslims, who have been victims of persecution in Pakistan, have been living in Galway for three decades, and the community's fourth caliph or leader visited the western capital during the religion's centenary year in 1989.

"This is why we are building our first Irish mosque here, as Galway has a particular significance for us," said Imran Ahmed Sheikh.

"Until now, we have been using a community centre in Wellpark for our worship." Several hundred members of the Ahmadi community attended yesterday evening's foundation stone laying, which was followed by prayers, readings from the Koran and a civic reception.

Bishop of Galway Dr Martin Drennan, senior gardaí and politicians were among those invited to a subsequent civic reception last night in the Clayton Hotel.

Muslims are now the third largest faith grouping in the Republic, mainly Sunnis, and there are about 3,000 Muslims in Galway. Ahmadi worshippers are in the minority,

but share good relations with fellow Muslims, Imran Ahmed Sheikh said.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889, and it is estimated that there could be as many as 200 million worshippers worldwide, mainly in several African states, Pakistan and Indonesia, with up to 30,000 in Britain and 15,000 in north America.

The community believes in separation of religion and state and “jihad” by the “pen rather than by the sword”.

In 1974, Pakistan’s parliament amended the country’s constitution in an attempt to isolate Ahmadis, and 10 years later the Pakistani administration of General Zia-ul-Haq banned them from identifying themselves as Muslims at all. As a result, the religion moved its headquarters to London. However, the community has been subject to continuous attacks in Pakistan, and some 93 people were killed in May of this year in gun attacks on two Ahmadi mosques in Lahore.

Earlier this month, an Ahmadi was killed in a grenade attack on a mosque in Pakistan. Last month a Pakistani American who was a leader in his Ahmadi community was shot dead in the southern Pakistani city of Sanghar.

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