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# All in this Together

corrymeela   
*Together is better.*

Words by  
Alex Wimberly  
*Leader of the  
Corrymeela Community*

# The world needs community like never before

Photography taken in 2019





## *We need each other to thrive.*

That was the conclusion that Ray Davey reached as he witnessed the destruction of Dresden from a prisoner of war camp in the winter of 1945. As the Allies destroyed a city filled with refugees, Ray realised that he and his side had succumbed to the madness of war. A black and white world of goodies and baddies came to an end.

Yet Ray's connection to his fellow prisoners and his relationships with his captors led him to believe that beneath the rubble, there was still something discoverable within the hearts of people from every corner of the earth. There was a deeper power of empathy and compassion alive and well, a foundation upon which to build a better world. In recognising that essential work of restoring human community, the idea of Corrymeela began.

This same idea has propelled us forward these past several months. Even as we closed our residential centre in the weeks before lockdown, we remained determined to continue the essential work of building resilient communities through honest and engaged relationships.

As you can see in the photograph above, Hedley Abernethy has been working with a group of women at The Shankill Women's Centre. Through the *Belfast in the World* project, which helps turn our collective attention to the Decades of Centenaries, Hedley has helped folks from different parts of Belfast step out of isolation and connect with each other safely while learning more about a history they didn't know they shared. You can read more about this project on pages 8 & 9.



Meanwhile, Denise Bradley and others from Corrymeela have met weekly online with two dozen Syrian refugee families in Magherafelt. By checking in with each other and offering emotional support, by engaging in simple yoga practices, and by providing resources to address past traumas and ongoing anxieties, they have created a stability upon which to build something new. Through the giving and receiving of care and curiosity, a foundation of trust has formed – and on it, confidence has grown. Denise and her team have journeyed with these families as they have received support in filing for child benefits, shared recipes and tips, helped set up appointments with doctors and schools, and even started businesses in a drive to become self-sufficient. These extraordinary individuals have revealed themselves as both beneficiaries and contributors to the community of which they are already a part. ▶





Photography taken in 2019

These and other ongoing Corrymeela projects remind us of the power of human connection in a time of uncertainty – and of what is possible when we lean into faith rather than fear.

It's good to remember our need for one another as we note how fundamentally our own world has changed this past year. Institutions we relied upon have been shaken severely. Fractures and injustices we didn't see, or tried to ignore, have been exposed in ways that should make it impossible for us to continue as we had. The great leveler of COVID has humbled those who exalted their own power while leading us finally to exalt the humble who selflessly serve.

▽ **As heroes have risen to care for the sick and to fight for the vulnerable, we see clearly that empathy and compassion are not luxuries; they are still the foundation of a better world, and a key to our survival.**

It's with that eye toward what is essential that we have recognised what an extraordinary moment we are now in. At Corrymeela, we've long known that running a 24/7 residential centre means we rarely have a chance to implement change comprehensively. But in the first few weeks of lockdown, we saw that the extended period in which we wouldn't be able to host people on site could present the opportunity to get better at what we do, to update policies and make our operations more fit for purpose, and to rethink what is possible and needed going forward. It may turn out that the unwelcome arrival of COVID-19 will force us to change in ways we wouldn't have had the nerve to try.

We have spent this invaluable time re-examining our values and our direction. This has been a time to reconsider everything: from the use of the centre, to the purpose of the volunteer programme, to the responsibility that members and others have as part of a movement of reconciliation in a rapidly changing world.

Central to this work has been our strategic development process. Built from the ground up with community and staff input and with the advice of critical friends, our new strategy will draw from a clearer understanding of what our best contribution in the coming decade will be.

Tim Magowan, our Executive Director, and I began this process intentionally with a re-examination of our core values. Because of that, we are confident that the essential work of Corrymeela will carry on, and that the radical mission of the founders to 'go and see what needs to be done' will inspire our response to an emerging reality. Whatever the details of our strategy may be, we will continue to be a place of welcome for all who come through our doors. We will continue to challenge the injustices at work in society while being challenged by our complicity in what is fractured. And we will continue to let our honest relationships change us so that we can be a part of the change the world needs.

### **The world needs community like never before.**

In our ongoing work at the centre, in society, online, and through our daily encounters, we hope to demonstrate the same faith that Ray displayed seventy-five years ago. Even when our world seems to crumble before our eyes, we trust there is something greater than any of us alive and well in each of us: an empathy and compassion upon which to build a better world.

I am deeply grateful for the community that we are a part of, and I have been genuinely moved by the support we have received in this time of increased uncertainty. Because of your help, we will be able to reopen the centre safely, to see this pandemic through with confidence, and continue the essential work of being community with more and more people. Thank you.

**Grace and peace,  
Alex** ♦



Honest Reflection, Ethical Remembering

Words by  
Hedley Abernethy

# Facing 2021 Together

Everything is different now, of course: temperatures taken at the door, hands sanitised, we ask questions about health and travel in the past week. These new protocols do not diminish the obvious delight the group at the Shankill Women's Centre has as they meet face to face again.

Peering through my mask and visor I see clearly that being together is key to what we do. As 2020 draws to an end I ask these women, as I asked folks in Lisburn, how should we 'do' 2021. Many fear that the extremes will dominate the discourse, for some a time of celebration and others lament. They are certain that the pain & bloodshed that was visited on the island of Ireland in the 1920s has no place in the 2020s.

“”

I know I will have a better understanding of the other side of the community. And I'm hoping that a lot more people who take this programme will realise that as well.

As part of our Decade of Centenaries project, I was accompanied by Pearse Lawlor on a walking tour of Lisburn. Pearse is the author of 'The Burnings', a book about the riots following the assassination of RIC District Inspector Oswald Swanzy. He showed our group the sites of many homes and commercial premises like the former Catholic owned Connolly's pub, now a dancewear shop, that had been looted and burned. This was the first time the group had heard many of these stories told and a rich discussion took place afterwards about whether this could happen again. There was a sense that Lisburn has changed a lot in one hundred years but also a fear that sectarianism is still so deeply entrenched



within parts of our society and that it might not take much to light the fuse again. One participant reflected on the violence that marked this period and soberly remarked that there's very little to celebrate about the events that ultimately led to the partition of Ireland.

The sentiment that existed in Lisburn was repeated across Ireland as respective governments introduced legislation on both sides of the border that protected their new political status. Knowing this and also knowing Corrymeela's work in peace-building and reconciliation, how should we face into 2021? These are questions we ask ourselves and ones which the women at Shankill Women's Centre, as part of our Belfast and the World course, are also asking. We continue to challenge sectarianism and provide space and place for honest reflection for everyone, particularly those who are most marginalised. As we do so, we are guided by the Principles of Ethical Remembering which creates the safety to have these difficult conversations well.

**This remains our greatest challenge and our work in 2021 will continue to reflect this. ♦**

# Brexit & The Book of Ruth

## A Story for Our Times

Words by Pádraig Ó Tuama  
Photo by Kalie Reid

### Exploring Borders & Belonging

#### As 2015 moved into 2016, I began to fear that British-Irish relations would regress rather than progress.

Brexit was happening in mid-2016, and the rhetoric of Brexit echoed a wider rhetoric; blunt stories told poorly in order to push changes forward: changes that benefitted some, that devastated others, that polarised many, and that built on stereotypes of the other that undid the possibility of a serious imagination of the other.

What we needed was a story. Stories have the power to face us with ourselves. If a story is told well, it upsets some of our conveniences, and challenges the previously unchallenged. Stories have unexpected twists and turns. Stories find heroes in strange corners. Stories reveal something about the behaviour of people previously considered to be above reproach. Stories contain our projections, and our prejudices and – if we're lucky – we hear the story enough times that some of those projections and some of those prejudices are coaxed into a new imagination.

In the Brexit drama, the story of Britain and the story of Ireland is complicated. Where is Britain? Well, it's an island, but places outside that island – Northern Ireland in particular – have stories of Britishness. Gibraltar too, and the Islas Malvinas. And Ireland? Well, it's an island, it's an identity, and there's a border recognised by some and resented by others.

And so – in the aftermath of Brexit and everything it brings, which is still unknown – the story

of Ruth seemed a story for our times. Ruth: a widowed border-crosser, a foreigner on land not her own, a character of virtue whose national belonging was viewed before her personhood. Ruth: a person around whom laws gathered like vultures, but whose life is the hinge point of laws.

I was busy in 2016. I was leading Corrymeela, and poets are quick at some things but not at most. I needed help on the project.

▮ I knew that we needed to do something – find some story – to bring us together in the unfolding story of politics happening all around us.

I phoned Glenn. As it happens, he was looking for some change. He said yes. I breathed a sigh of relief. It took ten minutes to explain the story to him. He got it. He started reading, he started writing.

Over the next few years, we developed resources exploring Brexit through the lens of the Book of Ruth. We did not do this for the purposes of converting anyone to anything. We held meetings in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England that brought together about five thousand people in order to consider how the Book of Ruth might speak to a quality and practice of belonging in the here and now. The five thousand people voted differently. Some of them loved Britain. Some of them didn't. Some of them loved Ireland. Some of them didn't. Often – at the beginning of a session – we'd ask folks if they had a story in

their family of someone who came from Ireland, or went to Britain, or married a Protestant when they shouldn't have, or dated a Catholic. Stand up if you do; sit down if you don't. There was a rare person whose family history didn't include some kind of crossing, even in the small borders of our small islands. We discovered new borders: Cornish people marrying outside Cornwall. Northumberland sadnesses remembered. Island people from places off the coast of Ireland or Scotland who viewed mainlanders with anxiety. Somebody spoke about the mainland once, and they were misunderstood. They were a Protestant from Belfast and the mainland – to them – was Britain. Someone else thought they were talking about France. What we call the places we turn to is different. We turn to different places. We start at different points of the story.

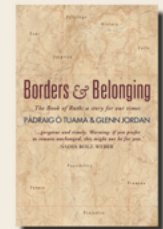
Mostly we met in homes and church halls, festival tents and corners of Cathedrals. There were people who loved religion and people who didn't in those meetings. "We're not here to make you holy" I'd often say. Glenn would usually mutter something about me not being holy myself. His mutterings were always gold. Can we find a story that might lead us to say things other than the things we are shouting at each other in the letters section of newspapers, comments sections of websites and social media, shouty parts of shouty programmes on the radio and television? Can we be held in some kind of narrative creativity by a story whose origins we do not know?

We hope so. ♦



Facing into 2021, a Brexit year, a centenary of Partition, we offer a new book borne from this work as a story that might hold us together.

Stories take strange turns and crises occur without warning; husbands die and famines arise and people are left without the plans they had so carefully planned. In life, too. Glenn died suddenly in June. I phoned Canterbury Press, we delayed the publishing, rewrote forwards and afterwords. We tried to hold ourselves together. Reading Glenn's words in this book – we each wrote alternative chapters – is like eavesdropping into his political mind; his linguistic mind; his storytelling mind; his sharp intellect; his sharper wit; his whiskey glass raised making jokes about Corkmen, telling stories of the family he adored with his whole heart, telling stories of the Britishnesses and Irishnesses he carried in his own heart.



Borders and Belonging: The Book of Ruth, A Story For Our Times by Glenn Jordan & Pádraig Ó Tuama is available from all good bookshops, online or from the Church House Bookshops.

"This book is gorgeous and timely. Warning: if you prefer to remain unchanged, this might not be for you."  
– Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber

# Yellow Teapot Conversations

Words  
by Denise Bradley  
Photos by  
Alex Wimberly  
& Pádraig Ó Tuama

We remember our friend and colleague Glenn Jordan, who served as our Programme Manager for Public Theology. Glenn died on the morning of 4 June 2020 at the age of 55.

**Glenn had a tattoo of a giant sequoia seed on the inside of his right arm and he would embrace every opportunity to speak into its story.**

I sense Glenn's life, mission and witness has borne a rich and plentiful harvest of these large formidable structures, their branches reaching high above our earth sharing and pondering story.

Glenn was a man whose values and integrity was deeply rooted in a rich and good soil and his heart, well, it was his heart that made him unique. It was a warm heart, a heart open to Christ's gospel message to love all peoples.

I witnessed Glenn reach out to broken people, lost people, searching people, curious people, challenging people and those estranged on the margins. Glenn spoke with the same enthusiasm of a conversation he had whilst walking back up to the office with the street cleaner as he did with those who influence and lead our society. Glenn would listen intently, with deep compassion to my often troubling stories and accounts of the violence, suffering, oppression and social injustice experienced by those I work with in our deeply fragmented communities.

The yellow teapot would come out and, over a cup of tea we would reflect on a theology for the oppressed and marginalised. During these conversations we acknowledged our own brokenness and wounds, often created by the humanity we both sought to love and serve.

We shared righteous anger against social injustice and magically, creative visions of intention and hope would emerge.

And, that is what embedded our friendship. His Bray lilt would offer wisdom, it was an honourable voice and oh that laugh. He would roar at my rants. It is his laugh I miss most in this office. There is a cruel stillness. Glenn will not bear witness on this earth to the fruition of the projects we imagined.

Glenn truly loved his precious Adrienne, Philippa and C.J. He told us often, speaking with a gentleness and kindness that sparkled through his eyes when he spoke their names. Glenn loved his two red haired dogs whose breed I always forget despite his constant reminders. Glenn truly loved his work in Corrymeela. He loved his role in Public Theology.

**Until we meet again, my friend. ♦**

“”

*He told me often:  
Blessed are those who have  
endured breaking by life  
for they are the resplendent  
cracks through which the  
light shines.*



**The seed that falls on good soil is the one who brings forth good fruit.**

MATTHEW 13:8

# Hard Listening

Words by  
Colleen Brown  
*Colleen is a member  
of the Corrymeela  
Community,  
living in Dublin.*

In a recent edition of the Irish Times, Taoiseach Micheál Martin shared how a meeting at Corrymeela in the 1990s with unionists & loyalists helped them all to *'detonate a few myths about each other'* and to build relationships rooted in trust rather than fear.



**Learning from this experience, as Taoiseach, Micheál Martin has developed a Shared Island Unit, as a part of the Irish government – reflecting his ongoing commitment to building relationships across the island of Ireland, including both sides of the border.**

And, nearly thirty years later, Corrymeela is still here, hosting difficult conversations – full of things which are hard, and important, to hear.

Could a no deal Brexit once again create a hard border?

Would this trigger a border poll?

What would happen if people were not prepared for dramatic political changes on this island?

Could there be a return to violence, and deeper division?

Would it help to start talking, together, about how we feel about all of this?

Why are we afraid to talk about this?

Over the past two years, the Dublin and Ballycastle Corrymeela Community groups have been meeting both sides of the border – sharing experiences, asking difficult questions, listening to challenging answers, and learning what it means to really live well together – on a shared island, in these very uncertain times. Beginning to speak about so much that has yet to be spoken about has been a deeply personal journey of finding a way through unknown territory together. It has been emotionally unsettling. And clarifying.

For now, whatever our shared future will politically be, this much is clear:

We are all here and we need to learn to live well together. Rooted in the values of inclusion and equality. The 'we' is more than Protestant and Catholic, more than also the Traveller community; the 'we' now includes people from Africa, Asia, the Americas and other parts of Europe. Our deep fear of what we will do to each other needs to be healed. This kind of healing – of our relationships – is a long time waiting but cannot happen overnight – deep distrust goes back way beyond The Troubles, and trusting each other with our future is really difficult.

Our histories of betrayal are as much East-West as they are North-South. In light of all this hurt: *What would a healed island look like? What would healed islands look like?* A real healing process within and between these Irish and British islands must create a true reconciliation of differences; a psychological and relational peace process, as well as a structural, economic and political one. What is most important to work on is a shared culture of mutual respect for each other, grounded by mutual trust in each other – to understand each other's fears and needs for safety. Regardless of a deal or no deal Brexit, rising sea levels will both expose and require a level of interdependence like never before. Neighbours will need each other. We need each other now. Not echo chambers.

**Corrymeela remains a brave space for this hard listening, and it is so much better to do this together. ♦**

# Keeping the Movement Alive

Words by  
Michael Gibbs  
*Michael is a member  
of the Corrymeela  
Community,  
living in Belfast.*

In the wake of the George Floyd murder the rise in awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement, I was approached by many Corrymeela members, friends and colleagues interested in making a positive contribution to the issue of race in our society.



**Although I am always happy to discuss and support (and welcomed the same in return during this difficult time for me as a black person in this society), I felt an important opportunity, which had arisen out of this tragedy, was slipping away.**

In the beginning, I engaged with so many of you who were on a wonderful journey of self-reflection and realisation about the depth of racial issues in our society and determined to do something about it.

Dismantling structural racism requires white people to become more than a little uncomfortable as they both acknowledge and relinquish their power in order to achieve racial progress. But that enlightenment needs to lead to action, not just deeper reflection, otherwise, it becomes part of the problem. This kind of self-indulgence is called *"paralysis by analysis."*

So, the question is how do we not wallow in our guilt and/or shame, but work to change it. Racial advancement is hard, often paradoxical.

▽ **Equality doesn't happen overnight, with the legacy of racism just vanishing.**

In my mind, I/we (people of colour) need to find productive ways to engage white allies, such as the Corrymeela Community, in the required work – making the change that society needs. Privilege is not in and of itself bad; what matters is what you do with privilege.

I find myself more and more trying to encourage my white family and friends to put their privilege to good use in the community and especially with those from different backgrounds, something most Corrymeela members are well placed to achieve. If we spend enough time being proactive, the social competence will come naturally.

If we don't get our hands dirty, we are at risk of becoming a politically correct nullity. We have to spend less time contemplating privilege and more time acting, to be part of the change. Therefore, my quest is to find meaningful ways for us to cultivate a deeper understanding across the barriers that divide us through regular conversations, coffee, dinners, watching rugby and friendship.

**I think Ray would encourage this, as it is the essence of Corrymeela. ♦**



*God with those on the margins,  
God with those on the edge:  
as we confine ourselves to what we  
know and retreat into spaces we deem safe,  
remind us that we are less likely  
to find you there.*

*We will find ourselves alone  
with the idols we carve and coddle,  
and miss the chance to touch your hem  
as you head out to those in need.*

*But even as we fold ourselves  
into our comfy pockets,  
your grace doubles back to find us and,  
with a cut, reveals the edge  
we stand against  
when we see ourselves as central.*

— Amen



Coming in 2021:

## The Corrymeela Podcast

History | Theology | Art | Justice

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