

That We May All Be One

For the month of Christian Unity, John Scally, teacher of Theology in Trinity College, introduces us to the ecumenical work of Julie McKinley.

January is the month we both look forward and look back, and it is when we celebrate the week of prayer for Church unity. It is important for all Christians to remember the repeated words of Jesus in John's Gospel. He told us that he was the vine, but we are the branches. Critically he stated that we should 'all be one'. He prayed, 'That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (Jn 17:21). The modern ecumenical movement that popularised much in Vatican II, has its roots firmly in the Bible.

For one young woman the week of prayer for Christian unity has a particular significance. Dr Julie McKinley works for the National Bible Society of Ireland, a non-profit organisation that is committed to the translation and publication of biblical texts. Her role involves connecting with local bible projects that promote biblical literacy and facilitating group engagement with Scripture at local and national levels. She recently completed her PhD in Jewish-Christian dialogue and is passionate about the idea that the 'biblical text can be a meeting place full of possibility, where multiple meanings can be found in sacred words as we engage in them together'.

Dr McKinley has an interesting background. 'We moved to Ireland from

America when I was aged nine to live near my grandparents. In school I attended both a Loreto Convent (Dalkey and Wexford), and Stratford College, the only Jewish school in Ireland. It was there that my love of Hebrew grew. My family had a mix of denominations – Catholic, Danish Lutheran (my father's mother), and a little further back my great great-grandmother's family, who had originally been Jewish, joined the Church of Ireland when they arrived here from Liverpool. Going to school in Stratford awoke within me a love of Hebrew and a deep desire to become better acquainted with the Jewish world, and from there I explored the possibility of studying Hebrew, Biblical Studies and Theology in Trinity College.'

Going to university changed her life in ways she would never have imagined. 'The first person I sat beside on our first day happened to be Philip. Now we are married! He is training as a Church of Ireland clergyman and has just entered his three-year Curacy in Meath and Kildare. We have one son, Cameron, aged sixteen, and three daughters, Izzy (thirteen), Eva (nine) and Tamara (three). Since then I have completed my M.Phil in Ecumenics at the Irish School of Ecumenics. I am part of the Irish branch of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Eleven years ago we had the oppor-



tunity to visit Poland. It was a sombre privilege to experience the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau together. I also volunteered for a season at the Irish Jewish Museum – a fantastic spot in what used to be known as “Little Jerusalem” in Portobello, Dublin.’

As the world entered a global pandemic in March 2020 the gates of opportunity opened for Dr McKinley.

‘As I was finishing my PhD, I came across an advert that was looking for someone “with a passion for Scripture”. Having used the Bible Society shop on Dawson Street for many years to purchase bibles and texts for college work, I was reasonably acquainted with the NBSI.’

Dr McKinley is keen to show how the Bible is an important resource for the resolution of some of our most pressing social problems. From the outset

Jesus publicly aligned himself with the poor and the outcasts, formulating an alternative model of society. Our search for the face of Christ cannot be authentic until we honestly confront the social structures that, for example, cause parents to feel that there is no option for them but to reluctantly send their children into hostel accommodation. It is surely a damning indictment that in the third millennium over 3000 Irish children daily are caught up in the ghastly nightmare of homelessness.

Dr McKinley recognises that people with a deep love of Jesus and the Scriptures understand the importance of providing shelter for the homeless and in understanding that if we are to ‘walk the talk’ in terms of our rhetoric about the dignity of the person, we must translate this in a practical way by providing affordable housing to all.

