



*Making
peace with
conflict in
the Church*

*Bridge Builders’
Annual Report 2001*

Director's Foreword



I thought the mediation process was invaluable and certainly was very helpful to me, and I hope as well to [the other person]. It enabled us to reach some basic understanding of each other's perspective, and to identify something of the difficulties and complexities of the situation.

I am aware of just how sensitively and carefully you and [your co-mediator] handled the discussion. I am grateful to you for having helped us to move forward to a more reconciled position.

The Most Revd and Rt Hon. David Hope, Archbishop of York, writing following his participation in an inter-personal mediation process led by Bridge Builders

Council of Reference

Marigold Bentley, Viscountess Brentford OBE,
Revd Canon Christopher Burch, Revd Elizabeth Caswell,
Andrew Clark, Most Revd & Rt Hon David Hope, John Paul Lederach,
Rt Revd Peter Price, Revd Dr Lance Stone, Revd Ernie Whalley,
Rt Revd Frank White, Lilamani Wickramaratne, Revd Dr Nigel Wright

2001 was a year of intense activity with a significant increase in demand for Bridge Builders' services. This is evidence that churches and their leaders recognise that they have more to learn about handling conflict and disagreement in their midst.

Currently churches generally view conflict as negative, which it can be. However, positive handling of conflict within the church can be seen as a central task of its calling: a source of energy and hope, and at the heart of discerning God's will for reconciliation with and in the world. The church has the essential grounding in the gospel to become a place of reconciliation and healing for its members in the face of major differences and diversity.

Senior church leaders report increasing levels of conflict within churches. Among the reasons is the increasing rate of change in society contributing to greater anxiety emerging in the church. There is therefore a need among British churches for new thinking, better skills and new structures to enable Christians and churches to handle their conflicts in positive ways, avoiding much of the destructiveness currently experienced. We need a new culture of peacemaking within the church.

The Mennonite tradition, seeing peacemaking as central to Christian discipleship, provides an ideal base from which to respond to this need.

This Annual Report for 2001 records progress in achieving the vision and goals set out in our year 2000 Development Plan. Production of the report has been delayed following my wife's illness with cancer, which has overshadowed my work in 2002. This has highlighted the need for a co-worker to be carrying the load alongside me. We need more financial partners to fund such a position. Please consider whether you can share our vision, and help us see it come to fruition.

Alastair McKay

Sowing the Seed – Training and Education

I appreciated the practicality of the workshop. In three years of a theological certificate programme that I have completed, nothing approached this in terms of usefulness, relevance and motivation. The course enables greater insight into what is going on in our church communities.

Barry Wright, from Kent, commenting on a one-day workshop

Absolutely marvellous, full of excellent content, and extremely well led. I knew I had really learned a lot and been engaged because the day felt so full and complete.

Revd Joanna Percival, Anglican priest from Surrey, commenting on a one-day workshop



Alastair McKay leading a training session for the Cambridge Theological Federation

Vision and Goals

The vision set out in our Development Plan is to transform the understanding of conflict in church life so that Christians are able to invite disagreement and appreciate the positive benefits of engaging with differences. The objective is therefore to equip Christians with the skills and understanding to be effective in handling church conflict, and to train a body of leaders within the church who can develop and promote this vision.

We set a goal of introducing 1,000 church leaders and members to new ways of thinking about and dealing with church conflict through our training events, between January 2000 and December 2004.

Performance in 2001

Bridge Builders held 14 training events around the country ranging from a 90-minute presentation to a ten-session workshop spread over three days. Six of these events were day-long training workshops. In total, over 460 people participated in one of these events. The majority of these were ordained and lay church leaders. The groups included the Eastern Area Baptist Ministers' Conference, a Churchwardens' training day for the Anglican Diocese of Guildford, and a seminar for the staff of the agencies at the Maria Assumpta Centre in London.

In addition, the Director of Bridge Builders tutored an MA module for mature students at the Missionary Institute London, accredited by Middlesex University. There were three students in the academic year 2000-2001 and five in the academic year 2001-2002, all of whom successfully completed the module.

Comments from participants in mediation skills training courses in 2001:

A genuine process is offered which really does work, and you experience it from all angles in order to get under the skin of it.

*Canon Barbara Merrick,
Anglican Local Ministry Officer,
Diocese of Gloucester*

I was stretched and challenged as well as given courage and skills for what seemed to be impossible church situations.

*Alison Phelps,
Baptist pastoral worker, Leeds*

The course helped me to reflect on the work I do in the church in a new way, and gave me skills to be a more effective minister.

*Revd Peter Flint,
URC minister, Berkshire*

An excellent course for people wanting to exercise a mediation ministry among groups or people in contention.

*Ven. Michael Paget-Wilkes,
Anglican Archdeacon of Warwick*



Participants in a mediation skills training course

Preparing the Hands – Mediation Training and Mediators’ Network

Vision and Goals

The vision set out in our Development Plan is to equip Christians from all the main denominations in Britain to be able to serve as mediators in local church settings, and to mentor and support a network of trained mediators who can respond to situations of church conflict.

We set a goal of training 250 people as mediators between January 2000 and December 2004, and holding ten follow-up training days for the Mediators' Network in the same period.

Performance in 2001

For the second year, we held two week-long intensive mediation skills training courses. They were attended by a total of 58 people, mainly church leaders from a variety of different denominations. For the first time we held one of these courses outside London, in Leeds. This pattern of hosting one course each year outside London is set to continue in future years. At present we are bringing over North American trainers to co-lead these courses with the Director of Bridge Builders. (This could change with the appointment of an Assistant Director.)

Our Mediators' Network continued to grow, with 53 paying members, 19 up on 2000. This ecumenical Network provides ongoing training for those who have completed the mediation course. Two Network training days were held in London, and a new Mediators' Network in the North was planned, and launched in early 2002 with a training day held in Leeds.

Building Bridges – Mediation Services



The mediation process overall brought me a lot of encouragement: the sense of at last being heard and understood; of having people coming together who, only a few months before, had been wounded by each other's words,

graphically portrayed on the last night by the joint report of [member A] and [member B]... It bears repeating that I think your mediation package is a valuable asset to the church of Christ, and that within it you yourself have a clear gift for giving hope and bringing discernment.

Unsolicited comment from a participant in a congregational mediation process led by Bridge Builders



Mediation training participants in small group discussion

Vision and Goals

The vision set out in our Development Plan is to offer mediation and consultation services in response to difficult cases of church conflict. The objective is to function as a small centre of excellence for mediation services to British churches.

We set a goal of conducting between five to ten congregational mediation or intervention cases between January 2000 and December 2004. No specific goal was set for inter-personal mediation cases.

Performance in 2001

Bridge Builders led 21 sessions, including some pre-mediation sessions, relating to nine different inter-personal mediation cases, in settings as diverse as Yorkshire, Wales and Surrey. These ranged from cases that were completed in one session and concluded with an informal agreement, to cases that involved three sessions and concluded with a written-up, signed agreement. Of the nine cases, six reached positive conclusions or

written agreements, one reached a decision to separate on a more positive basis than might otherwise have been the case, and two were inconclusive after the first meeting and not able to be continued.

Bridge Builders led one congregational mediation process, for a Baptist church in London. This covered 12 principal sessions of different kinds, conducted over a twelve-month period, and involved over 150 hours of the Director's time. The process enabled the church to understand the wide range of factors that had contributed to a time of crisis, to address significant hurts from the past, and to reach full agreement on six key areas of the church's life. The process facilitated a significant shift within the congregation, leaving it stronger and healthier.

Bridge Builders' practice is always to co-mediate. The Director worked with five different members of the Mediators' Network on the inter-personal cases, and three members of the Network on the congregational case.

Funding the Work – Financial Report

In 2000, Bridge Builders undertook a fundraising initiative with help from a professional consultant. A five-year Development Plan was prepared, and approaches were made to over 70 grant-giving charitable trusts. The main aim was to enable funding of another staff person to work alongside the Director. While over £7,000 in mostly one-off grants was raised in 2001, we are still short of the target needed to be able to recruit a new worker.

Bridge Builders is grateful to the following organisations for their support in 2001:

Grants of £1,000 or more

The Esmée Fairbairn Charitable Trust
The Fairbairn Charitable Trust
Mennonite Central Committee
The W.F. Southall Trust

Grants under £1,000

Baptist Union Tithe Fund
The Alfred Haines Charitable Trust
The Tisbury Telegraph Trust
The Gladys Wightwick Trust

Set out below is a financial summary of expenditure and income for 2001, with the budget for 2002. This does not take account of the London Mennonite Trust's (LMT) core fixed costs. Full audited accounts for the LMT, of which Bridge Builders forms a part, are available on request.

		Financial Summary	
		2001 Actual	2002 Budget
COSTS	Director's salary and on-costs (NI etc.)	23,824	24,600
	External trainers' fees	4,900	5,000
	Printing, publicity and stationery	2,195	2,200
	Travel and expenses	3,911	3,000
	Training and related costs	2,312	2,100
	TOTAL COSTS	37,142	36,900
INCOME	Fee income (training and mediation)	29,940	26,000
	Charged travel and expenses	1,866	1,500
	Grants: UK charitable trusts	7,230	2,000
	Grant: Mennonite Central Committee	6,296	2,700
	Donations: individuals	722	1,000
TOTAL INCOME	46,054	33,200	
Surplus / Deficit	+ 8,912	- 3,700	

Peacemaking is generally behind the scenes and costly. It is often thought of in the light of international conflict. For Bridge Builders the calling is to bring reconciliation to local churches and communities in conflict. Without local harmony anything wider becomes impossible and has no integrity to offer. So in today's church this work is timely and essential. I warmly commend it.

*Viscountess Brentford OBE,
Third Church Estates Commissioner*

It is hard to imagine an activity closer to the heart of the gospel than that of bringing reconciliation in situations of conflict. Bridge Builders is one of the first initiatives of this kind among the churches and deserves a widespread welcome and support.

The Revd Dr Nigel Wright, Principal, Spurgeon's College



Picture of the London Mennonite Centre by Esther Rose Graber



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