



# Journeying towards reconciliation

Bridge Builders  
Annual Report 2004



**Alastair McKay and Charletta Erb**  
*Photo by J Robert Charles*

## Director's foreword

One of the things I enjoy about hiking in the mountains is looking back at where I have come from and how far I have travelled. This report attempts to do that for the last five years of Bridge Builders ministry. I also like looking ahead. There are some significant peaks still to scale, including some beyond reach. But this will not stop us continuing the journey.

Our aim through the ministry of Bridge Builders is to effect a transformation of the inner life of the church in Britain. As we learn to handle conflict, deal with our differences, engage respectfully with one another, and make decisions in collaborative and consensual ways, we will be living out the gospel that Jesus revealed. My expectation is that this will transform the church's witness and outreach to the world, as well as the nature of the worship that we offer to God.

In looking back at the achievements of the last five years, and flagging the accomplishments in 2004, what is remarkable is how we have exceeded so many of our targets, set in 2000 with the expectation of having two full-time staff working with the service. As it turned out, I served on my own for the first four years, and only in 2004 did Charletta Erb arrive to assist me. I think, therefore, that there is reason to be proud of what, by God's grace, has been achieved.

I am excited about the companions who have been joining us along the way, and who have been catching the vision that Bridge Builders has promoted. For example, 2004 saw the landmark of publication of two British booklets on handling conflict: Colin Patterson's Grove booklet and Viv Lassetter and Ernie Whalley's Baptist Union booklet. Although they come from Anglican and Baptist stables respectively, it is notable that all three authors were trained by Bridge Builders, and have been part of our Mediators' Network.

In the autumn of 2005 I will begin working on a part-time Doctorate of Ministry, which will mean moving to a four-day week with Bridge Builders. Given the increasing demand for our services, I am therefore glad that the trustees have approved the recruitment of another staff person. I am delighted that the Revd Colin Patterson will be joining our team full-time in October 2005, based in Durham.

As we look toward the future, I envisage our service developing to offer a broader church consultancy programme. The full scope of this is still unclear, however we welcome your prayers and ongoing support for us as we seek to serve the church in Britain. Grace and peace to you.

Alastair McKay

*The course was a thorough, worthy examination of both issues and strategies to cope with conflict, from a leading expert.*

Revd Paul Hills  
Baptist Regional Minister commenting on a course for senior leaders

*I appreciated the wonderfully fresh approach of the course which highlighted areas of confusion in a way that opened up discussion on issues facing the church today. It put me in touch with personal and ministerial issues, and helped me especially to look anew at conflict and anger in my life.*

Revd Roger Edwards  
Anglican priest commenting on a course for the Diocese of Winchester

*The course has been an eye-opener. It gives practical skills for conflict management, and church members are empowered to do something positive about conflict.*

Yvonne Tetteh  
Commenting on a training course for Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church

*I strongly recommend Bridge Builders' workshop as a real opportunity to engage constructively with what so often present as deeply destructive situations. I rate it very highly amongst workshops I have attended.*

Rt Revd Dr Geoffrey Rowell  
Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe commenting on a workshop for the Bishop's staff



Course participants relaxing in the LMC garden

# Sowing the seed – training and education

## 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 positively engage with their differences. The objective is therefore to equip Christians with the understanding, skills and processes to be effective in handling conflict in the church, and to train a body of church leaders who can model and promote this vision.

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

## Performance

From 2000 to 2004, Bridge Builders held 115 training events (2004: 17) around the country ranging from one-day to four-day courses. In total, over 1,750 people (2004: 118) participated in these events – getting on for nearly double our target. Nearly all were ordained and lay church leaders. In 2004 the groups included: Anglican clergy from the Dioceses of London and Winchester, and the Bishop's senior staff from a Diocese in Europe; the leadership team from a Baptist church in Reading; Salvation Army officers from their Pastoral Care Unit; leaders from Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church, a primarily African congregation in East London; and an ecumenical group of leaders participating in the CPAS Arrow leadership programme. As this list shows, an outstanding feature of Bridge Builders' training work is the diversity of the different church groups that we work with.

In 2004 we also held our first training event specifically for senior church leaders. The three-day course, attended by 31 senior leaders from eight different denominations, was led by Speed Leas, probably the best known church consultant in the USA on issues of church conflict, and was well received.

In addition, the Director tutored a year-long MA module for the Missionary Institute London, accredited by Middlesex University. Between 2000 and 2004, 19 students (2003/04: 4) successfully completed the module. A further group of four students began the module in 2004, which will be the last group that the Director works with, after ten years of running the module.

Comments from participants in our mediation skills training courses in 2004:

*A unique course, offering a superb opportunity to learn skills so much needed in church and community.*

Ruth East  
Methodist families lay worker, Norfolk

*A down to earth course that really helps to teach skills, as well as introducing seriously important themes of power, personality, transformation, and group process – and it's good fun!*

Alison Moore  
Advisor in Pastoral Care & Counselling,  
Diocese of Durham

*An introduction to skills and methods of mediation which may begin many in Christian ministry on the road to personal and corporate wholeness in a divided, silent and hurting world.*

Revd Andrew Dodd  
Baptist minister, Lancashire

*This particular mediation process, taught by people who have a passion and commitment which they generously share with others, is powerfully healing in its simplicity and a great gift to the work of reconciliation.*

Revd Maureen Wilson  
URC minister, Scotland



Mediation training course participants at the LMC

# Preparing the hands – mediation training and mediators' network

## Vision and goals

The vision set out in our Development Plan is to equip a body of 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 10 follow-up training days for the Mediators' Network in the same period.

## Performance

From 2000 to 2004, Bridge Builders held 13 week-long intensive mediation skills training courses (2004: 5). They were attended by a total of 314 people (2004: 111), mainly church leaders from a variety of different denominations. This then is another target that we significantly exceeded. In 2004 we again held courses outside London, in Scotland, Coventry and Durham, the last of these on request for the Diocese of Durham. Holding courses regionally is part of our commitment to giving access to people across the country, and to developing regional networks.

A major development in 2004 was for Bridge Builders to lead two mediation skills courses without the assistance of experienced North American Mennonite trainers. Instead the Director co-led the courses with Colin Patterson, a member of our Network, and Charletta Erb. This is a mark of the growing British resources that we can draw on to help lead such training, of itself a sign of the impact of our work.

Our Mediators' Network has proved a notable success, with over 400 people (2004: 128) joining the Network from 2000 to 2004, for whom 25 training days (2004: 9) have been run, attended by over 290 people (2004: 104). We have therefore held two and half times more follow-up training days than our original target. This ecumenical Network provides ongoing training for those who have completed the mediation course, and the regional spread was expanded in 2004 with days in London, Leeds, Bristol, and Scotland – to which we have added Durham and Coventry in 2005.

While most people in the Network are not practising formal mediation, it is clear that church leaders find that they need the skills on a continual basis in their ministries, and the Network has enabled them to consolidate and develop those skills further. Over time, the Network may prove one of Bridge Builders most significant initiatives.

Comment from a member of Bridge Builders'  
Council of Reference

*There is a growing concern that the church and its ministers should be equipped to attend the conflict which undermines so much good work in our society in general and Christian communities in particular. The programme of thoughtful, systematic and Christ-centred action which is taught and practised by Bridge Builders is a highly significant contribution to the development of good practice.*

*I hope that their work will be ever more widely appreciated across the churches so that we may know what it means in reality to live in Christ's peace. As we learn lessons of transforming our own conflict, I hope that we may be able to be peacemakers in a troubled world.*

Rt Revd Frank White  
Bishop of Brixworth



Participants in a dialogue circle

# Building Bridges – mediation and consultancy services

## Vision and goals

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

We set a goal of conducting between five and ten congregational intervention or consultancy cases between January 2000 and December 2004.

Although not spelt out in the Plan, we also hoped to handle at least three inter-personal mediation cases a year, thus 15 in total.

## Performance

Between 2000 and 2004 Bridge Builders has led 58 inter-personal mediation sessions in 25 cases, working with 23 co-mediators from our Mediators' Network. (For 2004 the figures were 19 sessions in seven cases with three co-mediators from the Network.) This significantly exceeded our hopes. In the same period, Bridge Builders led four congregational intervention cases (one of which was concluded in 2004). This is slightly lower than the target in the Plan. There are two main reasons that the target was not achieved. First, with heavy demand for our training services, there has been little space for taking on intervention work. Second, with only one staff person for most of the five-year period of the Plan, we have had little time to respond to and follow up congregational enquiries we have received. Such cases require considerable preliminary work before a congregation commits to using Bridge Builders' services. However, a notable development in 2004 was the request for the Director to provide consultancy for a member of the Network as he led a congregational reconciliation process for an Anglican parish in the North East over a twelve-month period.

The inter-personal cases in 2004 included an Anglican diocesan team, an Anglican vicar and two readers, two couples who had been on the mission field with the Salvation Army, and a multi-cultural team from a Christian development agency. In all our mediation work, our practice is to co-mediate, and the Director worked with three different members of the Mediators' Network on the 2004 cases, along with Charletta Erb on a couple of cases. 2004 again saw members of our Mediators' Network taking on cases working together, with at least one successful mediation co-mediated by members of the Network.

Consultancy work during 2004 included: commenting on a book chapter for church organists on handling conflict with the clergy; a meeting to discuss training of mediators to meet demands arising from the Church of England's new Clergy Discipline Measure; and facilitation of dialogue in a Baptist regional team.

*One of the reasons that the world finds the New Testament's message of peacemaking and love of enemies incredible is that the church is so massively faithless. On the question of violence, the church is deeply compromised and committed to nationalism, violence, idolatry. ... Only when the church renounces the way of violence will people see what the Gospel means, because then they will see the way of Jesus re-enacted in the church.*

*Whenever God's people give up the predictable ways of violence and self-defence, they are forced to formulate imaginative new responses in particular historical settings ... The exact character of these imaginative responses can be worked out only in the life of particular Christian communities; however, their common denominator will be conformity to the example of Jesus, whose imaginative performance of enemy love led him to the cross. If we live in obedience to Jesus' command to renounce violence, the church will become the sphere where the future of God's righteousness intersects – and challenges – the present tense of human existence. The meaning of the New Testament's teaching on violence will become evident only in communities of Jesus' followers who embody the costly way of peace.*

Richard Hays writing in  
**The Moral Vision of the New Testament**  
(HarperCollins, 1996)

# Funding the work – financial report

Bridge Builders is grateful to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for its continued support in 2004, as well as to a number of individuals who gave a regular gift, or give by standing order. We made one successful approach to a grant-giving charitable trust in 2004, with a grant of £4,000 awarded by the Edinburgh Centenary Missionary Fund.

Set out below is a financial summary of expenditure and income for 2004, with the budget for 2005. This summary does not take account of the London Mennonite Trust's (LMT) core fixed costs. Full audited accounts for the LMT, of which Bridge Builders is part, are available on request.

For the first time since 2001 Bridge Builders made an operating surplus in 2004, thanks largely to our expanded programme of training courses.

## Financial summary

	2004 Actual	2005 Budget
<b>COSTS</b>	£	£
Director's salary and NI	27,250	28,000
Assistant director's salary and NI	0	6,500
Volunteer allowance & costs	5,300	6,000
External trainers' fees	5,400	6,500
Printing, publicity and stationery	3,550	4,000
Travel and expenses	3,050	3,500
Training events and related costs	10,950	10,000
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b>55,500</b>	<b>64,500</b>
<b>INCOME</b>	£	£
Fee income	53,750	50,000
Charged travel and expenses	1,450	2,000
Funding for volunteer	1,550	2,000
Grant: MCC & ECMF	6,000	4,500
Donations: individuals	2,450	2,500
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>65,200</b>	<b>61,000</b>
<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>9,700</b>	<b>-3,500</b>

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Rear of the LMC  
*Photo by Tim Nafziger*

# Bridge Builders

Transforming church conflict  
A programme of the  
London Mennonite Centre

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Alastair McKay

## Trainer and Mediator

Charletta Erb

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