



Bridge Builders' Network Newsletter

July 2007

REFLECTING ON 11 YEARS OF TRAINING IN MEDIATION SKILLS

When Bridge Builders hosted its first mediation skills course for church leaders, back in July 1996, led for us by Richard Blackburn, I didn't foresee that we would want to significantly change the basic course a few years down the road. However, we're currently planning a major revamp of the courses that we sponsor. Through our Bridge Builders' Network days, we're aware that most people in our Network are not using mediation in a formal way. Initial returns to a questionnaire sent out last week confirm this. The research is in preparation for our conference on Church Mediation (http://www.menno.org.uk/bbevents/mediation_conference) being held on 19 September in East London – which I would love to see more of you from our Network participating in.

Most people who've attended one of our mediation and facilitation skills courses are using those skills informally in their everyday ministry, especially in meetings and their interactions with others (including family members). At the same time, there is a growing awareness – especially among senior leaders – of the benefits of using mediation in conflictual situations, whether as part of formal denominational processes, or before the situation has escalated to that level. This calls for people with some solid training in inter-personal mediation process, and/or with training in leading a consulting process for small and large groups (where the conflict has moved beyond a few individuals). Bridge Builders is therefore looking at developing a new basic week-long course that will (among other things) help to raise leaders' self-awareness, change their view of conflict as well as capacity to engage with conflict, and develop their skills to function better in dealing with conflict. The follow-up options (to be run less frequently) will include training in inter-personal mediation process, in group consulting process and in leading training workshops. And, in the medium term, we are considering the possibility of developing some kind of accreditation scheme for mediators and consultants. What do you think? I welcome your thoughts on these plans, which we hope will start to emerge in 2008.

-- Alastair McKay

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NOTE FOR NEW MEMBERS

As a member of our Network, you receive our quarterly Bridge Builders' Network newsletter by email. This seeks to highlight programme updates, book reviews, opportunities to develop your skills and wider mediation issues. We hope that the newsletter is a helpful supplement to Bridge Builders' Network Days, and a way of exploring issues around conflict in the church. Please give us feedback on what is useful to you or what you would like to read about. If you are interested in receiving previous issues of this email newsletter, reply to this email with your request.

LMC MAILINGS – POSTAL OR EMAIL?

You will soon be receiving the latest LMC mailing. You will notice the mailing is in a new format, in an attempt to save on costs and paper. You can help save costs further by offering to receive all mailings by email rather than by post. Let Sharon (bb@menno.org.uk) know if you are happy to receive all mailings by email.

FROM THE NETWORK



Being Aware of What We Model

In my relatively short career in church mediation I have been struck by the fact that the Church, of which I am a part, entrusted with the task of proclaiming a gospel of reconciliation, frequently seems to fail to practise what it preaches. Like Jekyll and Hyde characters, we are kind and compassionate to some and hard and judgmental to others. The Bible exhorts us not to judge others, and yet we, you and I, often seem to do just that. Gerard Hughes put it this way:

“Why is it that very religious people, who may spend much time in prayer, can often become so intolerant, inhuman and cruel? Their conviction of their own righteousness is so strong that, far from being troubled by their cruelty, they congratulate themselves on their single-minded dedication to the cause of right. They are so convinced that God is on their side, that God's ways and their ways have become indistinguishable.”¹

Gerard Hughes extols the virtue of being able to ask questions about things that some at least find it difficult to understand. Such approaches are not always welcome, and can produce responses like “Christ is the answer! Isn't that good enough?” Secular organisations, I have found, have often been more welcoming to those who ask questions and challenge traditional practices.

Members of the BB Network may have some answers but I wonder if part of our attitude stems from the way we are ‘taught’ to subscribe to a particular doctrinal ‘position’ as the only answer to an ‘interest’: ie to be a good Christian you must subscribe to this view. And if someone takes refuge from another church just down the street and questions some belief or practice of their new home, they may be met with a comment like, “We have always done it this way!” Gerard Hughes suggests we hold in balance three things: the critical aspect of our faith (in which we try to be precise about what we believe), the institutional element and the mystical element. All three can vary depending on who you are, your doctrinal starting point, and which ecclesiastical model you find helpful. But if we lose sight of any one of these aspects, our lives begin to go wrong and we get out of step with others and with God. I believe that part of our skill as mediators depends on holding these elements in balance when it seems to have been lost by those we are working with.

Having contributed to the prickly point and counterpoint in the past, I became a mediator and was liberated by the discovery that holding different views to others was OK. And, as I learned to listen to others, I made the astounding discovery that they had something useful to say - even if I didn't agree with it - which was not just OK, but good and enriching. I still struggle with the application of the theory, but I trust that I am aided by an increasing self-awareness, especially when modelling a process with my fellow mediator in a mediation or training session; our handling of differences offers a new and creative way of being in fellowship.

-- Chris Bocutt, counsellor and mediator in Ashford, Kent

¹ Hughes, Gerard W 2006 "God of Surprises" Darton, Longman & Todd London

PROGRAMME UPDATES



Bridge Builders' Network Days 2007-2008

For those of you in the North West, we would welcome you to join us for our Network Day on 6 September, for the first time hosted in Manchester. Also you will see below a wider breadth of topics for our Network Days, in response to feedback we have heard from BB Network Members. We are also excited to again offer some days on facilitating meetings, which we focus on for the last two days of the mediation skills course.

Please note that we have needed to raise our fees for our Network Days for 2008 to cover costs, as we have not increased our fees for several years. The new fees will be £20 for BB Network Members and £50 for non-members.

If you would like to join us for any of the 2007 or 2008 dates, email Sharon at bb@menno.org.uk.

AUTUMN 2007

6 September 2007 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, 9:45-4:15 [NB: Nearly Full]
Mediation skills development with a focus on reframing

6 September 2007 in **Manchester** at Church House Manchester, 9:30-4:15
Mediation skills practice [Places still available]

13 September 2007 in **Leeds** at South Parade Baptist Church, 9:30-4:15
Mediation skills development with a focus on reframing [NB: Nearly Full]

25 October 2007 in **Reading** at Abbey Baptist Church, 9:30-4:15
Mediation skills practice [Places still available]

WINTER 2008

10 January 2008 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, 9:45-4:15
Worship in the midst of Conflict

16 January 2008 [NB: Wednesday] in **Durham** at St Nicholas' Church, 9:30-4:15
Dealing with Difficult Behaviour

24 January 2008 in **Coventry** at Queens Road Baptist Church, 9:30-4:15
Dealing with Difficult Behaviour

SPRING / SUMMER 08

(venues yet to be confirmed)

12 June 2008 in **London**
Gilmore-Fraleigh Style Profile

12 June 2008 in **Leeds**
Facilitating Meetings

19 June 2008 in **Manchester**
Gilmore-Fraleigh Style Profile

19 June 2008 in **Reading**
Facilitating Meetings

Bridge Builders' Diary dates: forthcoming training courses

Our training programme continues to expand to meet the demand for skills training for dealing with conflict in the church and being an effective leader. 2007 is our busiest year to date as we work with church leaders throughout Great Britain in promoting a culture of peace in our churches.

Please see our website www.menno.org.uk for full brochures and application forms.

***Church Mediation: An Ecumenical English Conference**

19 September 2007, with Denominational Speakers, at St Katharine's in East London

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation in the Church

8-12 October 2007, Ushaw College, Durham

Training of Trainers

13-15 November 2007, London Mennonite Centre

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation in the Church

2-7 March 2008, Guy Chester Centre, London

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation for Senior Church Leaders

11-16 May 2008, Lindors Country House, Gloucestershire

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation in the Church

29 June – 4 July 2008, Scottish Churches House, Dunblane, Scotland

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation in the Church

19-24 October 2008, Whirlow Grange Conference Centre, Sheffield

*see *Special Events* below for more information

Focus: Church Mediation Conference

“Should I come?”

Why should you come to our first conference on Church Mediation? First, to find out what is going elsewhere around England, in different denominations. Second, to report on how you have been using mediation skills and to share stories “from the field” with people who are new to the idea of mediation in the church. And, third, to help shape developments in your own denomination: there will be denominational groups meeting during the day, and we expect these to have an impact on what emerges within each of the mainline denominations.

As an incentive, we are offering a £10 fee reduction to Network Members and hope you will take the opportunity to be a part of this exciting new event with Bridge Builders. Please download the application form from the website. http://www.menno.org.uk/bbevents/mediation_conference

Church Mediation: an Ecumenical English Conference

19 September 2007

The conference takes place on **Thursday 19 September**, from 9:45am until 5:45pm (with the option of evening dinner at 6:00pm), and is being held at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine's in the East End of London (see <http://www.stkatharine.org.uk/> for details of this lovely venue, where you can book to stay the night before or after the conference).

The cost of the conference is £60 (£70 with dinner) – however Bridge Builders' Network Members will benefit from a £10 reduction, making it £50 (£60 with dinner).

See www.menno.org.uk for a full brochure and application form.

BRIDGE BUILDERS' ARTICLES



Following a suggestion from Janet Conway, we offer the article below. It is written so that (perhaps with a few local details added) you could put it into your church magazine. You have Bridge Builders' permission to do that provided you include the following acknowledgement:

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What if ...our church hit a crisis?

Just suppose our church were to hit a crisis. Imagine that some storm blows up over an important issue and we have a significant conflict on our hands. Perhaps it threatens to split the fellowship. What would you do?

Here are 6 options:

- A. Pray that God will sort things out
- B. Tell the leader(s) to get a grip on things
- C. Leave before things get even more painful
- D. Call for others to resign or leave
- E. Do what you can to calm things down
- F. Suggest getting help from an impartial outsider

Answers A-D are all common responses to church conflict. But each of them has its problems.

Prayer is really important - but not the sort of prayer that abdicates responsibility: "Lord, just make everybody be nice" or "Lord, show *Them* the error of their ways." Prayer needs to be a way of preparing ourselves to act in God's strength, rather than a sanctified passing of the buck.

Placing all the responsibility on a leader (or a group of leaders) can also be a cop out. Certainly it's important to have good leadership in a time of crisis. Leaders need the right combination of firmness, compassion and thick skin. But that's hard, and it's made tougher when others act as if it's only leaders who can do anything to resolve a crisis. Usually, many can play a part.

Leaving is very occasionally the right thing to do - but not until you've asked yourself some hard questions. Would it be a case of simply running away from the conflict? Parting of the ways might help you to cope, but it won't help the church to deal with any underlying problems. You might be missing an important opportunity to learn new things about yourself, about others, and about God's power and grace.

Calling for resignations is probably the least helpful intervention you could make. The situation is nearly always more complex than it looks at a first glance, so we need to beware of jumping to the "obvious" conclusion: "It's X and Y who are The Problem." Typically, many people have contributed to the difficulties and a *variety* of measures should be taken to help sort things out.

That brings us to E and F: perhaps less common responses. How would it be to take positive initiatives yourself?

You might be surprised at how much influence you could have by **being an active peace-maker**. Imagine: when others seem to be winding things up, instead of following suit, you might talk more

quietly, think before you act, and pray “Make me a channel of your peace”. If you work hard at listening to people when they are het up, they will often calm down and be readier to listen to others.

Generally people are very reluctant to try the last option: **suggesting that an outsider could help**. What an admission of failure that would be! Really? Surely it’s wiser to admit that you’re out of your depth than to plunge on into the sea. The impartial person who can see things from all sides could be just what a church needs when it’s foundering. Maybe it’s a well-kept secret, but a number of church support organisations can provide that sort of help, and it’s not unknown for regional church bodies to have a small team of people who can be called on as mediators or consultants.

That was all “What if ...” stuff. But better to have thought about it before it ever happens.



Garden View of the London Mennonite Centre



The London Mennonite Centre's Patio

(Photo credit: Ed Shirk, LMC Host)

The London Mennonite Centre welcomes you to come by for a visit – to browse our bookstall, have tea with the centre staff, have a team away day using our chapel, or come for personal reflection in our prayer hut located in the beautiful garden. You are most welcome.

RESOURCES



Resource Highlight:

Appreciative Inquiry: Building on the Positive

I wonder if you have come across an approach to organisational change called “Appreciative Inquiry”. As I understand it, AI comes out of the experience of consultants who work with organisations by asking “What works well here?” rather than “What are your problems?”

There is now a lot written about AI. One helpful introduction is *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* by Sue Annis Hammond (Thin Book Publishing, 1998, 2nd edition). A useful free starting point if you’re new to it would be to visit the “Appreciative Inquiry Commons” at <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>. Notice that there’s a [page](#) on applying this approach to conflict. There’s also a PowerPoint presentation that you can download. It’s not, in my opinion, a very good example of how to use PowerPoint – too many words, too much academic jargon – but it will help you to get to grips with the essential contrasts between an Appreciative Inquiry approach and a problem-solving approach to conflict. AI highlights the crucial role of *reframing* in helping people to *see conflict differently*.

Good background reading for mediators. But be careful. As Scrabble players will know, an AI is a three-toed sloth – which may not be a very good metaphor for the process.

Google Group

A Google group for the Bridge Builders Network is now up and running! For those of you already signed on, ***please adjust your settings*** so that you receive each email as it comes through. This will ensure you will stay up to date with what is going on. Currently, we have on average one email per month, and therefore you should have no fear of it filling your inbox.

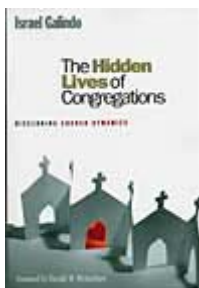
If you have not yet joined, or if you have any concerns or problems related to signing up to the group, please email Sharon at bb@menno.org.uk.

The group is one way to keep in touch with fellow Network Members and provides a forum for asking questions or offering ideas relating to mediation or conflict in the Church, including finding co-mediators or facilitators. So if you’ve signed up, please use the Google group now!

Recommended Reading:

[The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Understanding Church Dynamics](#)

by Israel Galindo



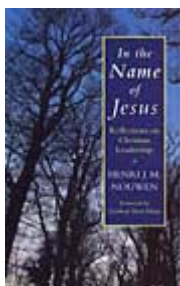
Faced with crisis, lack of direction, or just plain “stuckness,” many congregations and their leaders are content to deal only with surface issues and symptoms—only to discover that the same problems keep recurring, often in different, and more serious, ways. In *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, Christian educator and consultant Israel Galindo takes leaders below the surface of congregational life to provide a comprehensive, holistic look at the corporate nature of church relationships and the invisible dynamics at play.

http://www.metanoiabooks.org.uk/product_info.php?products_id=1940

More Recommended Reading:

[In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership](#)

by Henri Nouwen



In this treasure of a book, Henri Nouwen presents a powerful vision of leadership for now and for the future. As he looks back at his own life, the author reflects upon the challenges and the solutions that are faced by today's Christian leaders. Nouwen questions many of the current perceptions of how to lead, and takes the reader back to the lessons of Scripture and the lived example of Jesus.

http://www.metanoiabooks.org.uk/product_info.php?products_id=2003

[Helping People Forgive](#)

by David W Augsburger



Using resources from scripture, theology, and the social sciences, pastoral counsellor David Augsburger explores the complicated issues of Christian forgiveness and reconciliation and their real-world applications. He asks, 'What exactly is forgiveness? Is it always possible? If so, how? Is it ever optional? What role does repentance play in forgiveness? Does reconciliation imply a return to the prior relationship or the creation of a new relationship?'

http://www.metanoiabooks.org.uk/product_info.php?products_id=362

“Despite the forces at work which seem to have marginalised the church, we stand today faced with a great new opportunity to speak the good news of Christ into our culture by the way we live that truth in the life of the local church ...

There are hungers in our society that make the life of the church at least potentially of great significance ... There is a great hunger for relationships today ... There is also a great hunger for demonstration today ... People want to see whether it works.

The church is called to be the pilot project of the new humanity established by Christ ... Not least is the world looking for models of handling conflict ...

Conflicts in the church can seem such a distraction from getting on with the real work; but *this is the real work*. When people come near such a community they will instinctively know how real the relationships are.”

Canon Robert Warren, the Church of England's National Officer for Evangelism, writing in *Being Human, Being Church* (London, 1995), p154

Grace and Peace to you, from the Bridge Builders team

-- Alastair, Colin, and Sharon