



Bridge Builders' Network Newsletter

November 2007

Bethlehem speaks in many tongues

May we hear the voice of God in our own language this Advent.

-Sharon Kniss

Every homeless refugee, desperate for a bed for a night, understands the agony of Joseph of Bethlehem.

Every frightened teenage girl, pregnant and lost, comprehends the bewilderment of Mary.

Every executive, trying to reconcile commercial realities with moral imperatives, identifies with the local innkeeper.

Every working person, in a daily routine awakening to a sudden reverence for life, experiences the awe of the Judean shepherd.

Every ruler or intellectual, coming to the limit of human power, evinces the humility of the Magi.

Every tyrant who keeps in control by means of ruthless and harsh practices, knows the insecure fear of Herod.

Every infant, born on the rubbish heap of a city slum, shares the indignity of the Holy Birth.

Bethlehem speaks in many tongues....

—Ron O'Grady, Northern Lights Friends Meeting,
North Easton, Massachusetts

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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



Putting Matthew 18 into Practice

A Baptist pastor shares his experience of dealing with difficult behaviour from Brian, a church member:*

When I arrived at the church 6 years ago, many people felt very embarrassed and wearied by Brian's procedure in church meetings. They found him argumentative, rude, insensitive and very inclined to pursue his own private agenda of issues which nobody else felt was relevant.

Brian saw himself as the 'expert' on Baptist church life and procedure. He made it his unofficial role to know the church trust deeds and procedures better than almost anyone else, so that he could not be contradicted when he raised issues of procedure. The record of hurt caused to individuals went back several years before my time as pastor.

At the point where his wife threatened to leave him if he didn't change his behaviour, he agreed to enter a regime of discipline involving withdrawing from meetings and meeting monthly with me for counselling. Following this programme, we readmitted Brian to church meetings, and for a year or so his behaviour was markedly better. However, over the next couple of years or so it deteriorated again and he returned to his previous manner.

Eventually, last summer, after several discussions between him and members of the leadership, at which he was unwilling to countenance changing his behaviour, the leaders decided to ask the church to exclude him from church meetings, which they agreed to do. Brian's response was to begin a vendetta and 'guerrilla warfare' as he put it, threatening the church and Baptist Union with legal action amongst other things. Eventually this culminated in a very unpleasant verbal attack on one of the leaders at Christmas.

In a further meeting with me and another leader, Brian was unwilling to recognise that what he had done was wrong and detrimental to the fellowship of the church, so the leaders asked the church meeting to withdraw his membership, which was agreed unanimously. It was shortly after this step, that Brian, still attending Sunday services, was deeply touched by the Holy Spirit in a service and stood up at the end to express his sorrow and repentance over the hurtful comments he'd made at Christmas. He has since expressed publicly in prayer his desire to draw into deeper fellowship with the church again.

Brian is still on a journey of change. He is meeting voluntarily with me for further counselling and accountability over his intention to change – so that he can be monitored and encouraged in putting into action the things he says he wants to do now. We hope that eventually he will demonstrate through changed attitudes and approach that he has indeed repented and we will, I hope, readmit him into membership, should he wish to do this (currently he feels this is not appropriate for him).

So we're not there yet, but we do have hope that this extensive process - largely based on Matthew 18 - has been faithfully and positively followed. On each occasion when disciplinary action has been recommended to the church, we have emphasised that the ultimate aim is to see Brian changed and restored into a renewed fellowship within the church.

We would be interested to hear of similar experiences from other church leaders, including those who are not Baptists. To what extent is it possible to apply Matthew 18 in this way in your denomination?

* Not his real name

CHURCH MEDIATION CONFERENCE



In September Bridge Builders held its first national conference on the subject of church mediation. Nearly 50 people gathered at St Katharine's in the East End of London for a stimulating and successful day. You can read Alastair's opening presentation to the conference at www.menno.org.uk/node/161 in which he offers three challenges: first about changing the culture of how our churches think about and engage with conflict; second, about promoting and resourcing mediation as one way of dealing with conflict; and third, about recognising the limits of mediation, and taking a more systemic view of the conflicts that arise.

Some of the issues highlighted during the conference were:

- The need for our churches to find better ways of dealing with conflict
- The importance of education in changing the culture of how conflict is handled in the church

- The need to consider how church mediators might be accredited
- The need for a network to link Christians involved in mediation in many different fields in the UK

We have available the following Powerpoint presentations from the conference, which are largely comprehensible on their own:

- Alastair McKay's presentation
- James Behrens' presentation about mediation in the Church of England
- Paul Hills' presentation about mediation in the Baptist Union
- Will Morrey's presentation about mediation in the Methodist Church
- Chris Seaton's presentation about Peaceworks, whose focus has mainly been on mediation in schools

Please email us at bb@menno.org.uk if you would like to be see any of these.

PROGRAMME UPDATES



Bridge Builders' Annual Report for 2005-2006

Bridge Builders' annual report covering 2005-2006 was published in September, and was recently sent out to everyone who was a member of the Bridge Builders Network in 2005 and beyond. In his foreword, Alastair writes about the need to change the culture in the church for dealing with conflict, to create "a divine contrast-society" (Gerhard Lohfink's phrase). The report can be downloaded from our web site at <http://www.menno.org.uk/node/158>. Please email us at bb@menno.org.uk if you would like to receive a printed copy.

Financial Support for Bridge Builders

The London Mennonite Centre as a whole, and Bridge Builders in particular, is facing a challenge to maintain our current level of activity with the income we receive. Current income is well below expenditure. In consequence our prices will be going up in 2008, and in the New Year we are likely to be launching a major appeal for people to support us. If you share our vision and would like to make a one-off donation, or become a regular donor to support Bridge Builders' ministry, then please contact Alastair at alastair.mckay@menno.org.uk.

Please also join us in praying for our financial situation to improve. Thank you.

Bridge Builders' Diary dates: 2008 Training Courses

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

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation in the Church [FULLY BOOKED]

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

Church Leadership & Family Systems with Richard Blackburn

3-6 June 2008, London Mennonite Centre

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation in the Church

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

Responses to BB Questionnaire on the Use of Mediation Skills

Alastair is very grateful to the 116 people who responded to his brief questionnaire, about the use of mediation skills, at the end of July. This represents just over 20% of those who have ever attended our five-day mediation and facilitation skills training course. Just over half of those who responded were Anglicans, nearly a quarter were Baptists, with a spread from other denominations. Of the respondents, 13% were senior church leaders, nearly 50% were ministers in local churches, and 13% were in regional or national roles, such as diocesan or national adviser.

Two thirds of those who responded had completed the mediation and facilitation skills training course in the last four years, while only 10% did the training in the 1990s. This probably says something about Bridge Builders lack of a current email address for earlier participants, but it may also be an indication that those who completed the training more recently are more aware of its impact.

Here are some highlights from the responses:

- Nearly 90% of respondents indicated that they use the mediation and facilitation skills they learnt in their everyday ministry or work.
- 66% of respondents indicated that they use the skills in meetings which they chair, while 55% of respondents use them in meetings where they are a participant (the differential probably indicating that many respondents are regularly the chair of meetings which they attend).
- 66% of respondents indicated that they have used the skills in informal mediation between people with whom they have had contact.
- A little over 40% of respondents have used the skills in leading a formal mediation or facilitation process – a higher proportion than Alastair was expecting. Nearly 60% of the Baptist respondents indicated that they have used the skills in formal mediation or facilitation, compared with 40% of the Anglican respondents. (Numbers for the other denominations are too low for the percentages to be as meaningful.)

We have not had the resources to fully process all the information yet, but we hope to report on some of the networks which respondents are connected to at a later date. Alastair would still be glad to hear from you if you didn't respond to the questionnaire in the summer. Please contact him at alastair.mckay@menno.org.uk to receive the questionnaire again if you can spare five minutes to complete it.

Bridge Builders' Network Days 2008

For those of you in the North West, we would welcome you to join us for our second Network Day in Manchester on 19 June. For those of you in Scotland, we are delighted to return to your area on 25 September, venue to be determined. 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 we now only process bookings once we have received payment for the day. Our cancellation policy continues at full refund if notified at least 10 days in advance of the day.

If you would like to join us for any of the 2008 dates, please post payment along with notice of the day you wish to attend, to Bridge Builders, 14 Shepherds Hill, LONDON N6 5AQ. You can also email Sharon at bb@menno.org.uk, but we will not process your booking until payment is received via post. All days are £20 for current Network Members, including lunch.

WINTER 2008

10 January 2008 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, *Worship in the midst of Conflict*

16 January 2008 [NB: Wed.] in **Durham** at St Nicholas' Church, *Dealing with Difficult Behaviour*

24 January 2008 in **Coventry** at Queens Road Baptist Church, *Dealing with Difficult Behaviour*

SPRING / SUMMER 08

12 June 2008 in **London** at the **London** Mennonite Centre, *Gilmore-Fraleigh Style Profile*

12 June 2008 in **Leeds** at South Parade Baptist Church, *Facilitating Meetings*

19 June 2008 in **Manchester** at Church of the Holy Family, *Gilmore-Fraleigh Style Profile*

19 June 2008 in **Reading** (venue tbd), *Facilitating Meetings*

See www.menno.org.uk for autumn 2008 dates.

STAFF UPDATES



Colin to Lead First Northern Cross-Currents Event

Northern Cross Currents Seminar, Tuesday 12 February 2008

St. Nic's Church Youth Centre, Durham, 09:30-4:15

You may be aware of the Cross Currents programme that runs regularly at the London Mennonite Centre. Every couple of months there is a seminar: look at our web site to see the range of subjects

www.menno.org.uk/event/2007/11/26/list/all/5

In October, Colin Patterson led a seminar on **Jesus Facing Conflict: An Exploration of Matthew's Narrative**, which he will be repeating as the first ever **Northern** seminar. Here's what Colin says about the first run:

"I had been doing a special study of Matthew's gospel for many months and found that some fascinating insights emerged from examining the way story of Jesus is told. A key element of the narrative is conflict. Matthew highlights the idea that Jesus faces tension and opposition at many points and by his actions and his teaching he subverts all our assumptions about the way conflict must pan out. A seven-act drama can be seen, in which the movement of the plot is mirrored in the movements from place to place.

I wanted to offer a seminar so that a group could voyage through the whole book in a single day and discover its striking portrait of Jesus. The response from participants was very encouraging, and I hope to turn some of the material into a book."

But you don't have to wait for the book! E mail crosscurrents@menno.org.uk to book a place at the Northern seminar. Fee: £30. Includes VAT and meal. More details on the web site.

Alastair on Sabbatical

Alastair McKay will be on sabbatical from the beginning of January until the end of April. In January it will be 12 years since Alastair helped to launch Bridge Builders (along with Nelson Kraybill, then director of the London Mennonite Centre). Alastair has been heading up Bridge Builders work full-time since September 1999, and so he is very much looking forward to this extended break in the New Year. Following the guidelines set by the Centre's trustees, Alastair will begin by spending a month on retreat at a Benedictine monastery in Victoria, Australia (see www.benedictineabbey.com.au/index.html). He will then travel with the rest of his family, Sue, Eleanor and James, for three weeks in Australia and three weeks in New Zealand. On his return to London he will be pursuing his Doctorate of Ministry studies.

Sharon Exploring Worship and Conflict

Sharon has begun work in exploring issues surrounding leading worship and music in the midst of conflict or crisis in the congregation. She is also exploring in what ways worship can be a part of promoting a healthy view of conflict in the church. The London Network Day in January will provide network members an opportunity to take part in this exploration.

Administrative Assistance Needed

Bridge Builders is seeking a volunteer administrative assistant to help with the major administrative load that we carry, having significantly expanded the number of courses that we are offering over the last two years. *Please pray with us that we can identify someone suitable.*

RESOURCES



Metanoia Now UK Distributor of Alban Institute Titles

Alban Institute - The Alban Institute is an independent centre of learning and leadership development with a focus on congregations. Located in greater Washington, D.C. (U.S.A.), Alban is a not-for-profit, membership organization that develops and shares knowledge through consulting, publishing, research, and education programmes. (from the Alban Institute website)

The Bridge Builders team have found Alban Institute a helpful resource for nurturing healthy congregations and healthy Christian leaders. We are indeed excited, then, to announce that **Metanoia Book Service**, a service of the London Mennonite Centre, now serves as the U.K. distributor of Alban Institute titles. The following two books come recommended by Will Newcomb, Metanoia Book Service Manager.

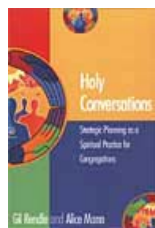


Healthy Disclosure: Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations

by Kibbie Simmons Ruth & Karen A McClintock

“Congregational consultants Kibbie Ruth and Karen McClintock show clergy and laity how to appropriately handle information. From proper ways to respond to rumours to relating information about a staff firing to the congregation, Healthy Disclosure is filled with step-by-step ideas for handling different types of sensitive material.”

(see www.metanoiabooks.org.uk)



Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice

by Gilbert R Rendle and Alice Mann

“Popular Alban consultants and authors Gil Rendle and Alice Mann cast planning as a “holy conversation,” a congregational discernment process about three critical questions: * Who are we? * What has God called us to do or be? * Who is our neighbour? Rendle and Mann equip congregational leaders with a broad and creative range of ideas, pathways, processes, and tools for planning.”

(see www.metanoiabooks.org.uk)

Google Group

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!

LMC CHRISTMAS PARTY 2007



The staff of the London Mennonite Centre requests the pleasure of your company at the **ANNUAL LMC CHRISTMAS PARTY - 8 December 2007**

In addition, we are bringing back an older tradition of **LEAF RAKING DAY**. In years past these two events have been combined into a wonderful event at the London Mennonite Centre.

When: 8 December 2007

Leaf Raking: Starting at 2:00 PM – We will be working in the LMC rose beds, so please bring some good gloves if you have them.

Christmas Party: Beginning at 4:00 PM – There will be good food including a hearty soup, home baked Christmas cookies, Mulled wine, and other holiday treats. We will decorate the LMC Christmas tree and spend some time singing Christmas carols as well. We are also inviting the Shepherds Hill neighbourhood to this event.

Where: London Mennonite Centre – 14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ

RSVP: It would be helpful to know if you plan to come for the leaf raking/gardening, but otherwise no RSVP required.

We are looking forward to seeing you. Come and celebrate for as much of the day as you like.

With Christmas Cheer,
LMC Staff