

Mediators' Network Newsletter

21 April 2006

Easter Greetings from Bridge Builders!

In this Mediators' Network newsletter, we again offer resources and news to maintain our connection with you as we work together to promote a healthier Church.

On a personal note, both Christmas and Easter took on special meaning for me in the midst of the hostage situation for Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Iraq. You will have heard about Norman Kember and his colleagues on the news. At Christmas, this crisis put me in touch with the vulnerability of God incarnated in a violent world. Good Friday was the taste of death and the memory of our brother Tom Fox who was sadly killed just before the release of the rest of the captives. Shortly after receiving this news, I reflected in despair with close friends as we asked where was God who answers prayers we hopefully pray.

But as Easter People in a Good Friday World (the title of the recent CTBI Lent series), we experience the resurrection of Christ who died, who lives on in our hearts, who liberated the CPT captives. In all my joy at the news of the liberation of the CPTers, I had the privilege of leading worship in Trafalgar Square as vigilers gathered one more time in celebration. We gave thanks, mourned, and reaffirmed our own commitments to making peace.

Christian faith holds such hope and redemption! That hope inspires us to be creative and take risks for peace in the midst of conflict. In this issue, David Cockburn, a member of Christian Peacemaker Teams and graduate of Bridge Builders training, shares with us his thoughts on peacemaking in the face of danger.

We pray that this Easter renewed your hope in Christ who has overcome death. With hope for future victories, and with praise for all that is already secured, we sing:

Goodness is Stronger than Evil
Love is Stronger than Hate
Light is Stronger than Darkness
Life is Stronger than Death
Vict'ry is ours, Vict'ry is ours
Through God who Loves Us

- *From the Wild Goose Worship Group*

In Grace, Love, and the Fellowship of the Spirit

Charletta Erb
for the Bridge Builders team

In this issue...

Programme Updates – New BB Assistant in July; BB 10th Anniversary Celebration; Expanding BB Website; Diary Dates

Resources – New Metanoia Titles, Online Resources

Opportunities – CRE seminar, Marshall Rosenberg Nonviolent Communication, St Ethelburga's Opening Bedouin Tent

Book Review – I See Satan Fall Like Lightning by Rene Girard reviewed by Colin Patterson

Meditation – Easter reflection from a Christian Peacemaker Team member, David Cockburn

* **NOTE FOR NEW MEMBERS** – As members, you receive our quarterly Mediators' Network email newsletter. This seeks to highlight programme updates, book reviews, opportunities to develop your skills and wider mediation issues. We hope that this newsletter will be a helpful supplement to Mediators' Network days, and a way of exploring issues around conflict in the church. Please give us feedback on what is helpful 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 BY EMAIL** - Please let us know if you are interested in the possibility of receiving other London Mennonite Centre publicity by email rather than by post.

Programme Updates

Bridge Builders 10th Anniversary Celebration

This year, we are celebrating 10 years of ministry. We host a celebration on Thursday, 6 July 2006 from 2:30-5:00pm at the London Mennonite Centre. We hope that you will be able to join us, so please mark your diary and let us know whether you can come by emailing bb@menno.org.uk

We are grateful for donations of over £1,300 to assist Bridge Builders' ministry, given to mark the anniversary. Please contact Alastair at alastairmckay@menno.org.uk if you would like to help us reach the £2,500 target.

New Assistant Joining BB Team in July

Sharon Kniss, a graduate of Eastern Mennonite University has agreed to join us as the new Bridge Builders' Assistant in July when Charletta Erb moves back to the States. Sharon is due to arrive on 4th July in time to join us for the 10th anniversary on the 6th July. We will introduce her to the Network then! We are very thankful for the provision of another set of gifted hands to join us in the ongoing work and mission of Bridge Builders.

Expanding Website

In the next few months, Bridge Builders will be expanding its sections of the LMC website to provide articles of interest, useful links, and other resources for facing conflict in the church. Watch the website for additional resources. www.menno.org.uk

Bridge Builders Diary Dates

Mediators' Network Days 2006

The May-June Network Days will focus on practising mediation skills through role-play, using a single scenario throughout the day. The emphasis will be on concluding the mediation process, including drawing the problem-solving stage to a close.

Numbers are low for our upcoming Network Days in Bristol (May) and Leeds (June). If you would like to join us, email bb@menno.org.uk.

11 May 2006 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, 9:45-4:15

18 May 2006 at St Michael's, Stoke Gifford in **Bristol**, 9:30-4:15

15 June 2006 at South Parade Baptist Church in **Leeds**, 9:30-4:15

7 September 2006 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, 9:45-4:15

14 September 2006 at Queens Road Baptist Church in **Coventry**, 9:30-4:15

21 September 2006 in **Durham** at St Nicholas' Church, 9:30-4:15

Diary dates: forthcoming training courses

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

Church Leadership and Family Systems

6-9 June 2006, with Richard Blackburn at LMC **FULLY BOOKED**

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training

26-30 June 2006, Guy Chester Centre, London **FULLY BOOKED**

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training

9-13 October 2006, Foxhill Conference Centre, Frodsham, Cheshire

Training of Trainers

21-23 November 2006, at LMC

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training for Senior Church Leaders

19-23 March 2007, The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training

23-27 April 2007, Lindors Country House, Lydney, Gloucestershire

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training

11-15 June 2007, Guy Chester Centre, London

Congregational Conflict Consulting

3-7 July 2007, with Dave Brubaker and Alastair McKay, at LMC

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training

8-12 October 2007, Ushaw College, Durham

Training of Trainers

13-15 November 2007, at LMC

Resources

New Titles from Metanoia

The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Understanding Church Dynamics by

Israel Galindo. Looks at the hidden dynamics in the life of the church through insights from family systems theory. This book provides useful tools for understanding congregations, applying appropriate leadership skills, and moving beyond surface issues and into the future life and mission. Highly recommended by a member of the Mediators' Network. Published by **Alban Institute** www.alban.org/ which produces many relevant resources for working through conflict in the church.

Little Books A recent series of Little Books recently produced by professors of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University. (Where Alastair McKay studied for his MA, and where Colin is attending Summer Peacebuilding Institute this summer.) Experts have written accessible and affordable books on a range of subjects from Restorative Justice, Conflict Transformation, Strategic Negotiation, Biblical Justice and Trauma Healing.

One book that particularly catches our eye is *The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking* by Kay Pranis. It explores origins and applications of circle processes similar to the dialogue circle or Samoan Circle processes we teach. If you are interested in exploring the depths of such processes, this would be a good resource.

I See Satan Fall like Lightning (See review by Colin Patterson in this newsletter (below))

The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference by Malcolm Gladwell (London: Abacus, 2000) Short review by Alastair McKay

I read this book with a trainers' group whom I meet with on a quarterly basis. It analyses the "tipping point": that moment when ideas, trends and social behaviours cross a threshold, tip, and move into the mainstream. For me one of the interesting ideas he picks up on is "the diffusion of innovations": this provides a way of conceptualising what Bridge Builders is trying to achieve by training a group of church leaders who will help to bring about adoption by the wider church body of new ideas for health in the inner life of the church (by working at conflict transformation, consensus-building, etc).

Order titles from Metanoia Book Service by contacting Will Newcomb (metanoia@menno.org.uk)

Metanoia will soon launch an online bookstore at: www.metanoiabookstore.org.uk

Online Resources

Matt5-9 A website for Christians involved or interested in resolving conflict and harm within the church. This website offers Biblical references on conflict. The visionary of the website, Matt Wilcox, approaches church conflict from the angle of restorative justice. Matt shares his vision on the website, "My heart is to see the principles and techniques of restorative justice being returned to action in the communities they were originally ordained for – the body of Christ." www.Matt5-9.co.uk

John Truscott Church Consultant and Trainer, who started Administry, has many useful resources for building healthy churches. We were interested by his articles on subjects such as: training, email, leadership, and saying goodbye to church members. www.john-truscott.co.uk

Mennonite Peace & Justice Support Network We recently came across a wealth of materials for worship, teaching and discussions on themes of peacemaking. For those of you familiar with the Conflict Styles material by Thomas Kilman, you may be interested in the online questionnaire and conflict style animal types for working with youth or the young at heart! <http://peace.mennolink.org/index.html>

Ekklesia Launches Peace Fund A new Internet Service Provider (ISP) will help fund a range of projects including peacemaking trips to conflict zones, training for Christian peacemakers, and research into non-violent alternatives to conflict. The initiative comes from the thinktank Ekklesia www.ekklesia.co.uk which works in partnership with a number of peace groups in the UK, including Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT).

Jonathan Bartley, Ekklesia's director said; "the peace movement is notoriously under-resourced. Whilst there are university departments set up to study military strategy, government departments dedicated to supporting military solutions, and whole industries geared up to the development of weapons, there is relatively very little to develop and support nonviolent initiatives. The venture is to help give peace a chance." www.peacenik.co.uk

Opportunities

Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE) seminar Many readers will know of the Christian Resources Exhibition, held regularly at different locations around the UK. In October 2006, it is moving to Harrogate, its most northerly location yet! Colin Patterson will be giving a seminar with the title **Handling Conflict: How to grasp the nettle and help congregations walk the path of reconciliation** It's timed for 11.30 – 12.15 on Thursday 19 October.

So, Network members in the North, why not visit CRE, see lots of good resources for Christian ministry, and fly the flag for conflict transformation. More details about CRE at www.creonline.co.uk

Marshall Rosenberg Nonviolent Communication *Getting to the Heart of Resolving Conflict* Sunday, May 21, 2006, London. A Day with Marshall Rosenberg, international peacemaker, mediator and creator of Nonviolent Communication (NVC). This event is being hosted by Mediation UK and The Centre for Nonviolent Communication. For more information: www.mediationuk.org.uk

St Ethelburga's Opening Bedouin Tent A place where faiths can meet and learn from their differences. St Ethelburga's is developing a new garden space dedicated to the meeting of faiths. It will be a distinctive new home for inter-faith co-operation and exploration in Central London. The project will be launched in the first week of May, with 10 days of vibrant and wide-ranging events. For more information: www.stethelburgas.org

Book Review by Colin Patterson

I See Satan Fall Like Lightning by Rene Girard

In the run up to Easter, and at a time of runaway violence in Iraq, I have been reading Rene Girard's book *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. Girard is an anthropologist with profound observations about human behaviour. One of his key insights is that rivalry is at the heart of human social relations, and it is inherently likely to produce a reinforcing spiral. Seen in this light, Jesus' death was the supreme example of scapegoating, i.e. the process of breaking the spiral by directing violence against a single victim.

Girard writes as follows about the Cross: "When Paul asserts that he wants to know nothing besides Christ crucified he is not announcing his contempt for knowledge. Paul believes quite literally that there is no knowledge superior to knowing the crucified Christ. If we go to this school of knowledge, we will learn more about God and humankind simultaneously than if we look at any other source of knowledge. His suffering on the Cross is the price Jesus is willing to pay in order to offer humanity [a] true representation of human origins that holds it prisoner. In offering himself in this way, he deprives the victim mechanism of its power in the long run."

Girard goes on to comment on the victory of the Cross (Colossians 2:15): "In the triumph of a victorious general the humiliating display of those who are conquered is only a consequence of the victory achieved, whereas in the case of the Cross this display is the victory itself; it is the unveiling of the violent origin of culture. The powers are not put on display because they are defeated, but they are defeated because they are put on display."

Girard points out that many ancient myths revolve around an act of communal violence, but only in the Christian understanding does God stand firmly on the side of the *victim*. And so, "the Resurrection is not only a miracle, a prodigious transgression of natural laws. It is the spectacular sign of the entrance into the world of a power superior to violent contagion ... It enables the disciples to recognise for themselves what they had not recognised before and to reproach themselves for their pathetic flight in the preceding days. They acknowledge the guilt of their participation in the violent contagion that murdered their master ... The Spirit enlightens the persecutors concerning their acts of persecution."

As we remember the victory of Jesus, may we allow the same Spirit to enlighten us.

Meditation

Easter reflection from a Christian Peacemaker Team member, David Cockburn

Truth-telling is part of the good news, but "truth-listening" is perhaps just as important. We are only affected by what we hear, and what we experience. Listening – to God, to others, to ourselves help us to move on as people, to mature, and to become better peacemakers. But truth is vital, and the old adage that "truth is the first casualty of war" is only partly true – actually truth is usually a casualty long before a war starts, and long after it finishes. As Christians truth should be second nature for us, but we too can slip into 'spin' and not be totally honest when under pressure.

Peacemaking (or "Shalom-making") - requires experiencing the other, experiencing their life, and then acting in the light of that. In the incarnation, and his life with people, Jesus experienced the situations of those around him, and spoke, modelled and acted for peace. Much of that was at odds with the prevailing philosophy and religious practice (e.g. his inclusion of the downtrodden and the rejection of

domination, and violence). And the scandal of the cross – God dying – was a complete mystery to most people at the time – and subsequently.

While the gospels only record one or two instances of Jesus instructing his followers to "love your enemies", his whole life and purpose exemplified an expression of God loving his enemies! Jesus was prepared to suffer and die for his beliefs, but not to kill. God did what was necessary to transform enemies firstly into friends, and then into family: bringing God to people, and people to God – mediation! And if that was the way of Jesus, then is it not also the way for us? We must however ensure we get our priorities right; loving God with all our being, loving our neighbours as ourselves, and loving our enemies. However good our churches may be, if they are not helping us firstly to understand how to love God with all our being, love our neighbours, and love our enemies, and helping us to put that into practice, then in some way they are failing God's call.

In going to conflict areas, Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) hopes to "help people in conflict find ways of living together". That is risky, and tough, and sometimes tragic. But in being powerless in conflict zones, people respond to us differently, and we get to hear their stories, and experience their situations. People on CPT fact-finding and peacemaking visits ("delegations") come home having experienced the people and situations – truth-listening. They can then go on to truth-telling when they come back home, hopefully to bring change to situations of violent conflict. We also have the opportunity to model, and explain non-violence. In situations where people may say that suicide bombings are the only tool they have to address injustice, then offering them non-violent alternatives might transform them. Violence alienates, and prevents their opponents hearing them, or recognising their humanity; using non-violence allows their opponents' fear to reduce, potentially allowing them to be heard.

In talking so much about the hostage situation on the media recently, and facing some tough questioning, it has come as no surprise that most people don't understand what CPT does, or that there are alternatives to violence when dealing with conflict. We have been steeped in our prevailing culture for so long, that accepting an alternative view takes a long time. I have sought not so much to convince – I know I won't convince most people – but to explain in terms that people may be able to relate to. Stories of practical peacemaking on the ground have proved very powerful, and some may have understood. Being able to communicate our values, and our faith has been useful, but a huge challenge to us, and to those who hear. Using the phrase "the Jesus who was prepared to suffer and die for his beliefs, but not to kill" is a tremendous challenge to Christians.

Challenging Christians about the use of violence touches some deep nerves, but is an urgent need. Islam is currently having a debate about whether Islam is violent – but that debate has yet to start within the Church as a whole, and I believe it is vitally needed. I've also been able to challenge Hamas and Hezbollah to renounce violence – and interestingly both were organisations which spoke up for the release of the CPT hostages in Iraq. Perhaps they will listen to us – certainly I encourage you to pray for them.

Mediation perspectives can play a significant role in other situations. The approach of thinking yourself into the situation of the other side is crucial. What was the UK's response to having opponents with nuclear weapons? To develop British nuclear weapons. That is typical of states with nuclear weapons. Feel threatened? Then get weapons of mass destruction (preferably nuclear) to deter any invasion. If that's how we have reacted (and still react – the UK refuses to get rid of its nuclear weapons of mass destruction, and is looking at developing a new generation, as is the US), then why do we expect other countries not to react in the same way? The logic is the same. All the while, the ability to hear the other side reduces – including imposing sanctions which limit the possible contact from one country to another. Sadly it is leaders who identify themselves as Christians who are at the forefront of pushing for new nuclear weapons. So let's pray for reductions in tension, and for changes of heart in Washington, London and Tehran.

Do we expect people to hear? Not always, but "let those who have ears to hear, hear."

"What does the Lord require, but to act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

David Cockburn

For more information on the work of Christian Peacemaker Teams, visit their website: <http://www.cpt.org/>
And you can visit the CPT UK website at: www.cptuk.org.uk