

Bridge Builders' Network Newsletter

December 2006

Greetings from Bridge Builders! Now that I've completed over a year as a staff member I notice that I've stopped talking about "my new job". This is an opportunity to take stock for a moment, having settled into a new ministry.

For twelve years, prior to October 2005, being a diocesan laity development officer meant being jack of all trades ("You want it: I'll teach it"). Now I've swapped breadth for depth, plus a steady stream of weak jokes of the "Never fear, we have a conflict resolution specialist with us!" variety.

Teaching more intensive courses has a different, "higher octane" feel about it. I am constantly impressed by the calibre of the people who sign up for our courses, and privileged to be part of what is for many a life-changing experience. Keeping in touch with our "graduates" at Network Days is a great encouragement. It's like overseeing a national power grid – an impression that was strongly reinforced at our tenth anniversary celebration in July. Imagine that ten years ago Bridge Builders was just an idea! Then imagine what further fruit there may be in ten years' time – and pray for it.

Of course the most different thing about working for Bridge Builders is being regularly responsible for leading mediation and consultancy. But not as much as I had expected. The salutary fact is that there is much less demand for mediation than for training. Intervention by a trained outsider is the last idea on many people's minds when a church is in conflict. It is so difficult for people to be open when things are very tense, and I have learnt to expect significant booby traps to emerge once an intervention process is embarked on. So if you can act as an advocate for the idea of mediation, you have an important role to play in changing the go-it-alone culture.

The highlight of my year was spending three weeks at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute, run annually by Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia, USA. (www.emu.edu/spi) Do the same, if you possibly can: it's mind-expanding and heart-broadening. You can learn from so many people, from many nations, committed to the hard work of building peace, and discover that God is at work in surprising ways.

I realise that I am on a personal theological journey, learning to take proper account of biblical material on violence, conflict, reconciliation and peace. I have always found this Advent prayer helpful, as the malls flash with premature Christmas lights:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility: so that on the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead we may rise to the life immortal.

"Armour of light." Now there's a phrase to toss into discussions about renewing Trident

Colin Patterson, Assistant Director

In This Issue...

Programme Updates – Staff Happenings; Network Days 2007

New Opportunities –Trauma Healing workshop; Church Mediation Conference

From the Network – Jo Williams writes

Resources – New Article; Recommended Reading; Website; Networking

Reminder -- Name Change

NOTE FOR NEW MEMBERS – As members, you receive our quarterly Bridge Builders' 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 Bridge Builders' 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

Staff Happenings

Alastair recently attended an excellent facilitation skills workshop run by Circle Indigo at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in London. This was an opportunity to refresh skills and see what new things could be learnt. One very simple technique that Alastair was introduced to was the idea of putting a border around the edge of each flip chart sheet that is going to be hung up on the wall. Alastair and Colin used this on the recent Training of Trainers course, and it drew a number of very positive comments. Try it and see what a difference it makes!

Colin is currently working with Tim Foley, developing group Bible Study materials on conflict. *Conflict in the Bible: The Road to the Rainbow's End* comprises two units of six sessions each and is designed to be flexible to accommodate different groups' meeting routines and desires. A pilot of the first unit is due out in the spring of 2007 and needs willing groups to try the materials out before it goes for full publication. If you know a group that would like to be involved (Lent might be a good time), please contact Colin for more information. (colinpatterson@menno.org.uk)

Bridge Builders' Network Days 2007

The 2007 Network Days are set out below.

In January the days in London and Leeds will have a special focus on **dealing with difficult behaviour**, with a new workshop designed by Colin. The London day is now full, but there are still spaces in Leeds.

In February we will be holding our first ever Network Day in Reading, after several unsuccessful attempts with Bristol, focusing on developing mediation skills. The venue, Abbey Baptist Church, is a short walk from Reading station, and we hope that the day will attract some from the West Country, with the good rail link, as well as some in the South East for whom this is more convenient than North London.

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

11 January 2007 in **London**, 9:45-4:15: dealing with difficult behaviour [FULLY BOOKED]

18 January 2007 in **Leeds** at South Parade Baptist Church, 9:30-4:15: dealing with difficult behaviour

22 February 2007 in **Reading** at Abbey Baptist Church, 9:30-4:15: mediation skills practice

3 May 2007 in **Coventry** at Queens Rd Baptist Church, 9:30-4:15: mediation skills practice

10 May 2007 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, 9:45-4:15: mediation skills practice

28 June 2007 in **Durham** at St Nicholas' Church, 9:30-4:15: mediation skills practice

6 September 2007 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, 9:45-4:15: focus tbd

13 September 2007 in **Leeds** at the South Parade Baptist Church, 9:30-4:15: focus tbd

25 October 2007 in **Reading** at Abbey Baptist Church, 9:30-4:15: focus tbd

New Opportunities

In the Aftermath: Trauma Healing – 12-13 March 2007

Cross-Currents Seminar with Jayne Docherty

Have you ever wondered what to do after tragic events like the London Tube bombings, or how to respond to increased tension in your community?

After the traumatic events of September 11, 2001, a partnership was formed between Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) and Church World Service to support religious caregivers in the aftermath. This partnership was the beginning of STAR (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience), a training programme in trauma healing which has since been offered around the globe. STAR provides training and resources for leaders in religious and civil society to transform conflict, build peace and security, and support justice, through healing trauma in their communities and around the world. STAR's unique approach to trauma healing connects personal transformation with wellbeing in all sectors of society.

In March, the LMC will be offering a two-day STAR-lite training programme which will introduce the concepts and approaches of STAR and what they could mean for your community. We are privileged to have Jayne Docherty from EMU, the headquarters for the STAR programme, to lead the course. Don't miss the unique opportunity to participate in this important and life-transforming training programme.

Monday 12 March 10:30 am. – 5:00 pm and Tuesday 13 March 9:30 am. – 4:00 pm.
Fee: £95 (sponsored) £70 (individual); Fee includes VAT and two meals

Email crosscurrents@menno.org.uk to book

Church Mediation: an Ecumenical English Conference – 19 September 2007

This conference will give an opportunity to hear from senior representatives of some of the main denominations in England on their vision for the use of mediation in the church, what progress has been made over the last 10 years, and on future steps being planned. We have an outstanding set of speakers including:

Revd Paul Hills, Senior Regional Minister of the Eastern Baptist Association

Dr James Behrens, author of *Church Disputes Mediation* and chancellor of the dioceses of Leicester and Bristol

Revd Will Morrey, former President of the Methodist Conference and South Wales District Chair

Revd Elizabeth Caswell, current Moderator of the General Assembly and Moderator of the Eastern Synod

Major Mike Highton, Divisional Leader of the London NE Division

Participants are welcome from all the churches in England and beyond, with a broad range and rich mix anticipated.

Mediation within the church in England (and Britain more generally), is still relatively new. The Church has generally lagged behind the rest of society in using mediation as a way to handle conflicts within its midst. Yet as anxiety increases in society, and people become quicker to resort to litigation, the Church is increasingly in need of more collaborative approaches that offer the chance to address hurts within a relationship and rebuild a bridge, as well as seeking a mutual way to address specific issues. Mediation offers a positive way both to build agreements for the future, and to provide an opening for God's work of reconciliation.

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' Diary dates: forthcoming training courses

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

***In the Aftermath: Trauma Healing**

12-13 March 2007, London Mennonite Centre

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 [FULLY BOOKED]

Church Leadership and Family Systems

22-25 May 2007, with Richard Blackburn, London Mennonite Centre

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, London Mennonite Centre

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

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

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training

8-12 October 2007, Ushaw College, Durham

Training of Trainers

13-15 November 2007, London Mennonite Centre

*see *New Opportunities* above for more information

From the Network

Baptists, Burnley & Bridge-Building

Jo Williams shares news of where mediation training can lead you

I expect that, like me, you will have been on courses which were interesting but that failed to make any real difference to your life or work. I would be surprised if the same were true of your experience of mediation skills training courses run by Bridge Builders: I know that this course has been life-changing for many of us.

As a tutor for Northern Baptist College I have tried to promote an awareness of conflict and mediation among churches and ministers, mainly through day workshops for leaders focusing on the nature of conflict and the importance of working at building and maintaining good relationships through effective communication. Another important element has been making churches aware that mediation is possible

– and then not just to consider it as a last resort, but use mediators early to help prevent conflict becoming destructive.

After training with Bridge Builders I wanted to extend my knowledge and experience of mediation. So I volunteered with a local community mediation service in East Lancashire, thus gaining many opportunities to develop my mediation skills! The majority of this work is problem-solving mediation: helping neighbours resolve their conflicts and arguments about issues such as noise, fences and boundaries, rubbish and bins, not to mention the contentious problem of parking! We also offer more transformative mediation, working with families in conflict - particularly vulnerable young people and their parents - helping to prevent young people leaving home and becoming homeless.

Living in Burnley, a town with a recent history of uneasy community relations, means that there are plenty of opportunities to be involved in peace-building. As a senior mediator with SMILE (Specialist Mediation in Lancashire East) I have been invited to be part of the town's 'Good Relations Programme', working with trainers from Mediation Northern Ireland who have been sharing their expertise in dealing with widespread community conflict. We want to create a team of people who can respond to situations as they arise; and we are particularly exploring how this can be developed to work with faith communities.

Currently we are seeking funding for a project to work with leaders of mosques and churches. Our aim is to set up a mediation team of people who, understanding the importance of faith as well as conflict transformation and reconciliation, would be able to respond should conflict arise between faith groups. A further goal is to train Imams and Mosque Committees in mediation.

The project will involve creating a training course exploring how mediation has been developed and used in churches, to see if there are transferable skills and learning for the Islamic community. We are hoping that Alastair and Colin from Bridge Builders will be consultants, to see how our experience of congregational conflict may be tapped, whilst taking account of specific cultural and religious considerations.

This exciting new piece of work is dependent on a successful funding bid, but we consider this a really important initiative as we try to create a more peaceful and integrated community. I have gained so much from my Muslim friends and colleagues in Burnley, appreciating their desire and commitment to peace, and I hope that in some way I can support them and work with them to this end.

Joanna Williams, Regional Tutor for Northern Baptist College in the North West

Resources

New Article:

[Conflict Resolution for Churches](#)

An accessible article written by Colin to explore the relationship between conflict and the church and to further explore terminology and practical differences between conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict transformation.

Recommended Reading:

[A Culture of Peace: God's Vision for the Church](#)

by Alan and Eleanor Kreider and Paulus Widjaja, published by Herald Press, 2005.

A must for anyone in the Bridge Builders Network, this book is a major revision of the Kreiders' "Becoming a Peace Church" booklet and is an inspiring read. It sets out a clear vision for the church building a culture of peace in its internal life, worship, engagement with the world, and evangelistic read. Well written, and drawing from a scriptural well, it is also a great value at £6.95. Buy it now!

Website:

Photos, programmes, voice recordings, and a historical timeline from Bridge Builders' Tenth Anniversary Celebration are now up on the website. Visit www.menno.org.uk for opportunities to reminisce and celebrate with Bridge Builders on ten years of working to transform church conflict in Great Britain! The link for the celebration pages can be most easily accessed from the LMC's home webpage.

Networking

One of the primary purposes of the Bridge Builders Network is to keep network members in touch with each other so that collaboration and support between members can easily happen. In order to help facilitate this, and by popular demand from many of you, we have decided to begin a Google Groups discussion board and listserv.

The description of the Bridge Builders Network group is stated as such: This group aims to provide a space for interaction among Bridge Builders' Network members outside of Network Days. Bridge Builders staff encourage conversations among members for support, advice, sharing ideas, finding co-mediators or co-trainers and exchanges relevant to Bridge Builders' mission.

In the next week, Sharon will invite each Network member individually to the group. **Note: *It is very possible that the invitation email will go to your spam folder, so please keep an eye open for it.*** Sharon will send a follow-up confirmation email to make sure you have received the invitation email and further explaining specific details and instructions involved. Google will then request that you set up an account with them to sign up to the group. This is a secure group and is only available for persons by invitation, thus your posts and comments cannot be seen by anyone outside of the Bridge Builders' Network. We hope this venture into the cyberworld of connections will enable productive communication and sharing amongst Bridge Builders' Network members for collaborative edification. Please email Sharon at bb@menno.org.uk with any concerns or problems related to signing up on the group.

REMINDER:

As you may have noticed, we have changed the Network name from Mediators' Network to Bridge Builders' Network. This change is to reflect the wider goal of the network, which is to foster the development of a culture of peacemaking in the church, with development of mediation skills being only one aspect.