

Bridge Builders' Network Newsletter

March 2007

As I write, it's halfway through the season of Lent and I've been reading the Archbishop of Canterbury's lent book. That should say "Lent Book." He doesn't lend books to me personally, you understand, but he did invite Samuel Wells to write a book that would be promoted as the "official" read this year. I'm glad he did. Wells' book [*Power and Passion: Six Characters in Search of Resurrection*](#) deserves to be widely read, and kept on the bookshelf long after Lent 2007 is past.

Wells is an Anglican priest and so am I, so if this is all sounding a bit C of E, I should point out that he acknowledges that there has been a seminal Mennonite influence on his thinking. Apparently, reading John Howard Yoder's "The Politics of Jesus" had a life-changing effect, convincing Wells that followers of Jesus must be passionate in their hearts and political in their action, in the power of the Spirit. The major theme running through *Power and Passion* is that, in a world where power is often misused and many feel powerless, those who follow the way of Christ have more power than they usually realise. We need not cast ourselves in the role of victims or mere observers.

Wells' method is to pay careful attention to the passion narrative, as told by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and to note how each writer brings in different details to illuminate the power-play that was going on. We see the impact of Jesus upon Pilate, Barabbas, Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate's wife, Peter and Mary Magdalene.

I particularly like the way Wells uses "wonderings" to encourage the reader to get inside the biblical narrative and explore her/his own ambivalence about power, e.g. "I wonder what it is like to be tormented by someone who knows he or she has power over you." As Bridge Builders' staff, we have found that when working with people caught up in conflict, "wonderings" are often more helpful than direct questions. Questions can seem accusatory or even manipulative: "Why did you do that?" "Weren't you being rather cutting?" But wonderings can open a way to be imaginative: "I wonder how Jim felt when you said that?" "I wonder what ideas you have for what to do next."

So, a thought that I can take into the midst of times of tension and conflict. In God's strength, I have the power to make more of a difference than I think I can; let's wonder what's happening, and can still happen, through the power of Christ's resurrection.

Colin Patterson, Assistant Director

In This Issue...

Programme Updates – Network Days 2007 & 2008, forthcoming training courses

Special Event – Church Mediation Conference

Get Googling – A taster for our new discussion group

Resources – Recommended reading & web sites

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

Bridge Builders' Network Days 2007 & early 2008

After a series of new topics, including days in January on dealing with difficult behaviour, we are again offering basic mediation skills practice for our Network Days in May and September. In January 2008 we are provisionally planning to offer workshops on dealing with difficult behaviour and a day in London looking at the role of Sunday morning worship in dealing with conflict.

In February we held our first ever Network Day in Reading, and in September we will be holding our first ever Network Day in the North West – in Manchester.

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

SPRING

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

10 May 2007 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, 9:45-4:15
Mediation skills development with an emphasis on healing strategies

28 June 2007 in **Durham** at St Nicholas' Church, 9:30-4:15
Mediation skills development with an emphasis on healing strategies

AUTUMN

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

6 September 2007 in **Manchester** at Church House Manchester, 9:30-4:15
Mediation skills practice

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

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

WINTER [topics tbc]

10 January 2008 at the **London** Mennonite Centre, 9:45-4:15
Worship and 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

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 one of our busiest years 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.

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation in the Church

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

Skills Training for Mediation & Facilitation in the Church

11-15 June 2007, Guy Chester Centre, London
[WAITING LIST ONLY]

Congregational Conflict Consulting

2-7 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

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

*see **Special Events** below for more information

SPECIAL EVENT

Church Mediation: an Ecumenical English Conference 19 September 2007

We need your help in publicising this exciting new event – tell friends, colleagues, and fellow clergy members about this opportunity to hear about shared visions for the use of mediation in the church.

This conference will give an opportunity to hear from senior representatives of some of the main denominations in England about their vision for the use of mediation in the church, what progress has been made over the last 10 years, and 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 <i>Church Disputes Mediation</i> 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	Moderator of the URC General Assembly and Moderator of the Eastern Synod
Major Mike Highton	Divisional Leader of the London NE Division, Salvation Army

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.

GET GOOGLING

A Google group for the Bridge Builders Network is now up and running! Please email Sharon at bb@menno.org.uk if you want to join the group, or have any concerns or problems related to signing up.

The group is a good forum for throwing out ideas or questions. Here's a recent discussion on **non-violent communication & confrontation**:

Comment

Things got very heated in a church discussion thread yesterday, and I went in calmly advocating we use non-violent or person-centred communication, and try to find a better way to handle the discussion so people don't get upset and are better able to speak into the dialogue going on in the group.

Eventually, the person who is the most confrontational in the group came back with 'Jesus didn't talk like that. He confronted. So that's what I do.'

I was then aware that if I came back and continued the discussion advocating non-violent communication I'm being confrontational, so I've paused. Any suggestions?

Response

For me the key is to separate the ideas of non-violent communication and confrontation.

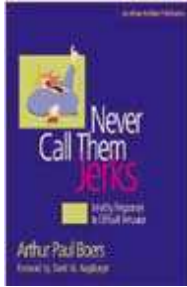
To confront is to raise a topic that is liable to expose a difference of views or produce tension. Clearly Jesus did confront others and urged his disciples to do the same ("If your brother sins, go ..." etc) But that is not the whole story. There are many instances of Jesus deliberately avoiding confrontation or doing it in a way that is as unthreatening as possible (think about the woman taken in adultery, for example). In fact, the only group of people with whom he was strongly and persistently confrontational was the teachers of scripture, and even then the first words of dispute always came from them not from him. The question therefore is not "Should Christians confront?" but rather "Under what circumstances and in what manner should Christians confront?"

When we talk about non-violence in communication we are referring primarily to motive and manner. The key issue is whether our communication hurts the other person. Violent communication, deliberately (or at least, by its manner, carelessly) causes damage. It fails to speak the truth in love. There are times when for someone else's good we need to say something that may be hurtful, but we should expect to think very carefully about how to say it in such cases.

So, in your shoes, my aim would be to model confrontation that is non-violent. For example, in the circumstance mentioned, perhaps it would be fruitful to acknowledge that confrontation is sometimes important, then explain why you have found the present confrontational behaviour harmful. Use an "I statement" in which you share a feeling, name the problem behaviour and its impact, and state what you would have preferred (e.g. "I feel distressed when people keep talking loudly and cutting across what others are saying because it causes disorder and nobody gets heard properly. I would prefer it if we each took a few seconds to think before we reply to what others have said, and try to speak gently when we disagree.")

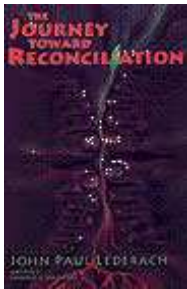
RESOURCES

Recommended Reading:



[Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behaviour](#)
by Arthur Paul Boers, published by The Alban Institute, 1999.

A classic in the Bridge Builders recommended resources, this book looks at being an effective leader in the midst of conflict, anxiety, and those people with “difficult behaviour”! Used as groundwork for our new “Dealing with Difficult Behaviour” Network Days, Boers’ work continues to offer fresh insights as we work with conflict in the church.



[The Journey Toward Reconciliation](#)
by John Paul Lederach, published by Herald Press, 1999.

Another favourite classic in the Bridge Builders recommended resources, this book by world-renowned conflict expert John Paul Lederach looks at the heart and soul of peace-building through stories about journeying through conflict towards reconciliation. Engaging stories from the pews and around the world shape this into an easily accessible, hope-filled book firmly rooted in Biblical principles.

Web sites to visit:

There’s an interesting article on **Racism, Scapegoating and Big Brother** on the Corrymeela web site. Visit www.corrymeela.org/comment/33.aspx

We’ve just passed the first anniversary of the death of **Iraq hostage Tom Fox**. Read about the memorial service at www.ekkleisia.co.uk/news/world/070315tomfox

In our society at present there is a big re-discovery of the **power of story-telling**. Visit the web site of AGORA for ideas of how public storytelling can promote justice and peace-building www.agoraspace.org/cgi-bin/page.cgi?11 You can download a powerful story called **A Tale of Two Messiahs**. It’s a provocative comment on the invasion of Iraq, written before the war in 2003 and sadly still very relevant.

Collecting people’s stories is the basis of the **Listening Heart project** in Bradford, which aims to build bridges between people in different faith communities. Visit www.churchleadershipfoundation.org/currentprojects/project7.htm for details.
