



# Bridge Builders' Network Newsletter

February 2008

From the Acting Director, Colin Patterson  
(Alastair McKay is on sabbatical):

## Bearing the enmity

I've learned a lot from the work of the Christian International Peace Service. CHIPS trains and supports small teams of peace-makers who work at grass roots level in various parts of the world. In their book *Making Peace*, a short uncomplicated manual setting out biblical principles for the work of CHIPS, author Keith Lindsey tells true stories and is aware that in peace-making "the stone so patiently rolled up the hill may roll down again." (p6)

I need to remind myself every now and then that this is par for the course when you're a mediator. "Trust the process" is good advice, but it doesn't mean (as I'm sometimes tempted to hope) that being thoroughly conversant with the process will lead inevitably to a satisfying conclusion. As a mediator you're often working with parties who are quite hostile to one another and, as Lindsey says in the CHIPS manual, "beginning to accept, tolerate and finally love [an] enemy is a slow, step-by-step procedure, which can get stuck, or go backwards, at any point". (p50) That quote comes from a chapter headed "Bearing the Enmity". It gets to the heart of why I find it hard to be a peace-maker in practice.

The thing I find most difficult to cope with is becoming a target. The more entrenched the animosity between the parties, the more likely it is that each will be appalled when I'm willing listen to the other. I know this in my head, but that doesn't make it any easier when both sides start directing their anger at me. That gets me in the gut.

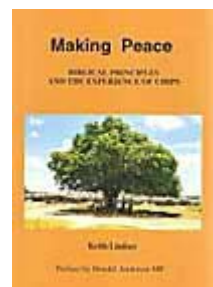
During an intervention in a church conflict, a co-mediator and I were working for a day with a group of nearly thirty people. Throughout the morning, the atmosphere seemed calm, yet

as time went on it felt as if most of the people were expecting the mediators to do all the work. We sensed that a number of key figures were willing the process to get nowhere so that they could say "We knew it would be a waste of time". During the afternoon no one was giving any signals of movement, but then there was an outburst of anger. It was triggered by clumsiness on my part. I framed a question for discussion unclearly and the first expression of strong feeling sprang up suddenly as a number of people got cross with me. In the following days, highly critical evaluations came my way – yet for opposite reasons. Parts of the day dismissed as completely pointless by some people were thought valuable by others. Everyone had a different idea of why things had gone wrong. I wrestled with my own sense of injustice that after weeks of gathering information, someone said the mediators knew very little about the situation.

In this circumstance, my role demanded taking the brunt of the anger without fighting or even arguing back. The most costly part of following Jesus here was being prepared to bear the enmity – to be something of a scapegoat. But, as Lindsey says, the distinctive feature of *Christian* peacemaking is that enmity can be channelled through Jesus to God. Certainly I had to bear it, but I did not have to bear it by myself.

CHIPS workers probably have to bear far more enmity than I do. Nevertheless, the whole experience has reminded me that I'm easily wounded, and I need God's grace to stand amongst sparks without catching fire.

*Making Peace* can be found at Metanoia Books:  
[www.metanoiabooks.org.uk](http://www.metanoiabooks.org.uk)



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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.

NOTE: The BBN Newsletter is produced for the exclusive use of Bridge Builders' Network Members and friends, as distributed by Bridge Builders. If you wish to reproduce any part of the newsletter for an audience further than yourself, contact Sharon Kniss for permission.

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## STAFF UPDATES




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### Receiving God's Good Gifts: From Alastair on Sabbatical

I have nearly completed my four weeks at an Abbey in Victoria, Australia. During this time I've entered into the worship life of the community, attending all of the offices from Terce through to Compline each day, occasionally making it to Lauds (6:30am), but never to Vigils (4:30am)! In the mornings, I've been working, mostly in the garden under Dom Placid's direction doing weeding, watering, fruit picking, mowing, trimming the dozens of lavender bushes, chopping wood, etc. In the afternoons I've been reading Ephesians in conjunction with an excellent commentary by a Mennonite pastor, Tom Yoder Neufeld, (see [www.metanoiabooks.org.uk](http://www.metanoiabooks.org.uk)), and reading Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. I've also discovered the joys of Lectio Divina, following Fr Michael's prompting at the first of our weekly meetings, and have worked with the Lectionary's gospel reading most days. After Compline – by which time the flies are waning – I've gone for a long walk, often down by Lake Bullen Merri. In the evenings I've read various books suggested by Fr Michael and Sr Mary Emmanuel, such as *Father Joe*

by Tony Hendra, *The Father and The Son* by Matt Murray, both biographies, and two novels by Gail Godwin, *Father Melancholy's Daughter* and *Evensong*, all of which I can recommend.

I have greatly appreciated my time at the Abbey – and I owe a huge debt to my wife Sue for taking on sole parenting of our children, aged 12 and 10, for five weeks. I identify three inter-related learnings during my time here. First is the value of stillness and quiet. All too easily so many things can distract me. Stillness promotes connection, centredness and awareness of what is around me. Second is the need to approach life with open hands in a child-like spirit, ready to receive what God has to offer. Third is the importance of being present in the moment, and attentive to how God might speak through each new person encountered – and there have been many other guests coming through during my month here. So this has been a precious time of receiving God's good gifts.

## FROM THE NETWORK



From Helen Thorp, County Durham:

### Passing on the Good News

After my first experience of Bridge Builder training I looked at Christian ministry through different eyes. Suddenly, wherever I turned, I recognised conflict. Why had I not seen it before?

The obvious answer is that I had not wanted to see it; I preferred to collude with its many disguises. And I colluded because I was fearful of opening my eyes and being overwhelmed by its potential to divide and destroy.

Bridge Builder training continues to widen my vision. I have been offered insights and skills that empower engaging with the potential of conflict for transformation. My confidence has grown, and increasingly I am more hope-filled (and less daunted) by my encounters with conflict. I could almost liken the change to a conversion; I certainly have good news to share!

And this has been how most of the training has been used. Whilst few opportunities have opened up for using mediation skills, I have found myself sharing some of the material that has been life-changing for me in an unexpectedly wide variety of contexts.

The initial catalyst was reading Sara Savage's chapter on psychological perspectives of shaping the Church of England for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in 'The Future of the Parish System'. Her commendation of Bridge Builders and the significance that she attaches to gaining skills in conflict transformation *throughout ministerial and post-ministerial training* challenged me to evaluate my roles as tutor to Anglican ordinands and Methodist student ministers and trainer of Authorised Pastoral Assistants in the Diocese of Durham. What might I do to promote awareness, understanding and good practice in relation to conflict?

Opportunities to lead workshops with other members of the Bridge Builder network have been significant; appreciation of the material has led to further invitations. A 3-Day Conflict Workshop is now part of the Leavers' Programme at Cranmer Hall/The Wesley Study Centre. Authorised Pastoral Assistants have a 1-day workshop in their final year programme. I have a connection with our

partner Diocese of Lesotho in southern Africa and plan to use culturally appropriate material with leadership groups when next visiting.

However, it has been in the one-to-one encounters that conflict transformation has been especially significant – bringing new perspective and direction to many conversations. Contexts have ranged from the formal settings of tutorials, spiritual direction and consultation, to the informal encounters in clergy gatherings, social events and exchange of emails. Conversation partners have included students in theological training, fellow staff members, lay leaders, and ordained leaders from a variety of denominations.

Bridge Builder training has enabled me to listen for, and name, conflict – and ask how it might be addressed. Often eyes are not open to conflict, and we fail to see difficulties in relation to its hidden dynamic. Early acknowledgement of inter-personal tension may be significant to the health of significant relationships: some personal problems look different in the context of congregational culture. Richard Blackburn's Family Systems training has enabled me to explore for myself and with others what differentiated leadership looks like in practice, and its empowering effect on group dynamics. I recommend articles, chapters and books that have widened my vision, and I offer to discuss them at a subsequent meeting. Where appropriate I sow the seed of mediation, explaining what that might involve and how it might open up a positive way forward.

I am just raising an awareness of conflict in Christian community. These conversations do not feel to have the same impact as direct involvement in delivering workshops or engaging in the mediation process, but I am coming to see that listening for conflict and offering a transformation perspective is a ministry in itself. And, whatever the benefits for others, the learning for self is rich. In the financially constrained climate of the Church in the NE the sad truth is that not many individuals will have the access to Bridge Builder training that has been my privilege. So I encourage the discipline of consciously looking for opportunities to pass on the good news: let us open our eyes to conflict – not in fear but in hope.

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## INTRODUCING OUR NEW FOUNDATION COURSE

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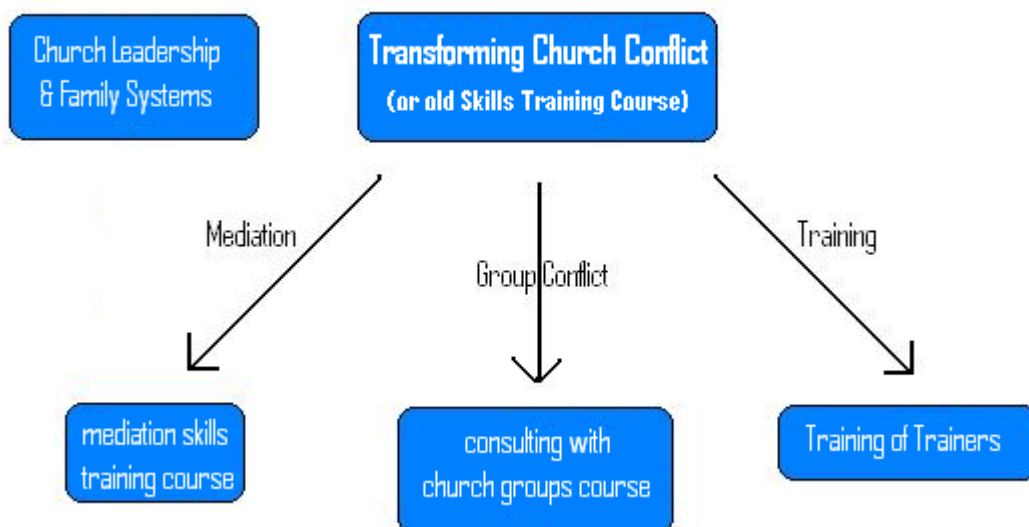
### Transforming Church Conflict: A Foundation Course for Leaders

2008 is an exciting new year for Bridge Builders. Each year we continue to dream visions for the ministry of Bridge Builders and adapt to meet what we sense to be the direction God is leading us. This year our dreams have led us to create a new basic week-long course, a "foundation course" for Christian leaders. We have discovered in conversations with you that the most transformative aspect of the current week-long course is engaging with new ideas of conflict – our perspective and understanding of it as well as our response to it. We want to provide more opportunity to delve into this significant shift towards viewing conflict as a potentially healthy aspect of daily life; a normal growth catalyst. We have also sensed the need for more opportunities in facilitation training and experience. We hope that these foci alongside old favourites of communication skills and "divided and bound together by conflict" and new foci on leadership, difficult situations, and reflective elements will form an exciting foundation for

Christian leaders who want to contribute positively to the lives of others and to the health and vitality of their congregations and work places.

Transforming Church Conflict will become the primary prerequisite for further training with Bridge Builders. We will continue to offer mediation skills training each year, but beginning in 2009, we will run a specific course on mediation with more time devoted to practice and assimilating the process. Those wishing to attend our Training of Trainers course (offered once/year) and group consultancy course (offered every other year) will have had to complete our foundation course first. Those having completed the earlier version of the Skills Training for Mediation and Facilitation will be able to count the course as equal to the new foundation course, serving as a prerequisite for further training. We currently plan on continuing to run Richard Blackburn's Church Leadership & Family Systems course each year, with no prerequisite.

The new structure can be visualised as follows:



## PROGRAMME UPDATES



### Bridge Builders' Network Days 2008

We have adapted our structure for Network Days in 2008, based upon feedback from you and our own discernment. We now hope to run a series of days in a season, repeating a programme in different parts of the country, and ensuring at least one mediation skills review opportunity happens in each season.

For 2008, the mediation skills refresher days are on **19 June in Reading**, **25 September in Scotland**, and **2 October in Coventry**. If you are looking to review your skills, please book on to one of these.

Other topics covered this year include a refresher and in-depth look at the Gilmore-Fraleigh Style Inventory, a day on facilitating meetings, and a day looking at group conflict situations.

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 Phyllis at [phyllis.shirk@menno.org.uk](mailto:phyllis.shirk@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.

*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.*

### **Welcome, Phyllis!**

As many of you know, we're pleased that Phyllis Shirk, one of the hosts at LMC is now also working as an administrative assistant for Bridge Builders. Among other things, she'll be looking after bookings for Network Days.

### 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** at Anderson Baptist Church, *Facilitating Meetings*

See [www.menno.org.uk](http://www.menno.org.uk) for autumn 2008 dates.

### Bridge Builders' Diary: 2008 Training Courses

Please see our website [www.menno.org.uk](http://www.menno.org.uk) for full brochures and application forms.

#### PLACES STILL AVAILABLE ON ALL COURSES:

**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

**Transforming Church Conflict: A Foundation Course for Leaders**

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

**Training of Trainers**

18 – 20 November 2008, London Mennonite Centre

## RESOURCES



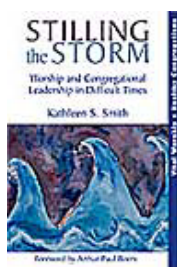
**From Metanoia** [[www.metanoiabooks.org.uk](http://www.metanoiabooks.org.uk) or ask for Will at the London Mennonite Centre]



### [The Human Face of the Church: A Social Psychology and Pastoral Theology Resource for Pioneer and Traditional Ministry](#)

by Sara Savage & Eolene Boyd

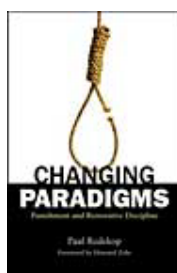
"Unlike books that offer quick-fix "do-it-like-this" instructions about how to sort out issues in the church, this is a book that encourages understanding of the underlying issues: it is written in a way that encourages intelligent engagement, with helpful boxes suggesting 'discussion points' and 'Pause for thought'." -- Joanna Cox



### [Stilling the Storm: Worship and congregational Leadership in Difficult Times](#)

by Kathleen Smith

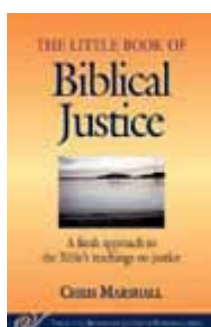
"In researching this subject, this is the only book I have found directly and thoroughly addressing the role of worship during difficult times. Many of Kathleen Smith's reflections and suggestions echo my own. Smith identifies three main types of difficulty congregations can face (crisis, transition, conflict) and looks at the particular role of worship in each situation." --Sharon Kniss



### [Changing Paradigms: Punishment and Restorative Discipline](#)

by Paul Redekop, *forward by Howard Zehr*

"After several decades working in the field of restorative justice, Paul Redekop concludes that punishment is a major obstacle to healthy societies, families, and schools. Punishment can be so damaging, cruel, and barbaric, especially to children, that it should be replaced with restorative discipline, and societies should move toward a punishment-free justice system." (see [www.metanoiabooks.org.uk](http://www.metanoiabooks.org.uk))



### [The Little Book of Biblical Justice: A Fresh Approach to the Bible's Teachings on Justice](#)

by Chris Marshall

"Upfront, Marshall addresses the many complexities that surround "justice" in the Bible: the Bible seems to hold conflicting points of view; there is a huge amount of data to deal with; the world of the Bible and our present world are vastly different. Marshall's honest treatment of this subject is direct, yet almost lyrical in tone. He manages a thorny, multi-faceted subject clearly and ultimately singles out the broad areas of theological agreement among the Bible's writers. Highly stimulating. Highly inspirational." (see [www.metanoiabooks.org.uk](http://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](mailto:bb@menno.org.uk).

### ***Cross-Currents Seminars at the London Mennonite Centre:***

(for more information visit [www.menno.org.uk](http://www.menno.org.uk) or contact Janelle Thiessen, [jthiessen@menno.org.uk](mailto:jthiessen@menno.org.uk))



[Jesus and Muhammad for Muslims and Christians](#), led by Chris Hewer, 8 March 2008

[Finding God at the Movies 2: A Weekend on Film and Spirituality](#), led by Vic Thiessen, 4-6 April 2008

[The Church as a Hostel: Living Hospitality](#), led by Andrea Lange, 26 April 2008

*Grace and Peace to you this Lent season, from the (reduced) Bridge Builders team: Colin and Sharon*