



Promoting a culture of peace

Bridge Builders
Annual Report 2003



Alastair McKay and Charletta Erb in the LMC garden

Director's foreword

Recently I saw a video entitled “*War No More*” advocating for the abolition of war. However unrealistic this goal may seem, the video makes the key point that promoting a new culture of peace is needed in order to eliminate violent and destructive conflict. I share that conviction.

We live in a world that more than ever needs the capacity for peacemaking and transforming conflict creatively and non-violently. As followers of Jesus, the prince of peace, I believe that Christians should be leading the way. For our witness to be authentic, however, I think that we need to show that we can make peace and transform conflict in the Christian community, in the church.

Central to Bridge Builders' ministry is the belief that we need a change of culture in our churches. We need a new culture of peace. But what does this mean? Among other things it means:

- seeking to address and transform the tensions and differences within our churches, rather than ignoring them or allowing them to develop into holy wars;
- having courage to face into and move through conflict, and dealing respectfully with one another when we disagree;
- developing skills to listen to and understand one another at a deeper level; and
- giving more attention to *how* we make decisions and deal with dissent.

Moving to a new culture of peace in the church is not going to happen quickly. It is a long term project, both at the level of an individual congregation and more broadly. And it will take leaders with vision and stamina to develop such a culture. When the church works at peacemaking in its own midst, then truly Christians have a gift to offer the world, marked by witness to the one who “is our peace”.

This Annual Report for 2003 records something of Bridge Builders' contribution to promoting a culture of peace in the church. It also charts the latest progress in achieving the vision and goals set out in our year 2000 Development Plan.

2004 has seen the arrival of Charletta Erb to work alongside me. Charletta is a Mennonite volunteer from the United States, recently graduated from Goshen College with a degree in Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies. She is helping to improve the service that Bridge Builders offers, as well as sharing the burden of the increasing demand for our services – much to my relief. I am thankful to God for her, and for the energy and enthusiasm that she brings, and also for all the Mennonite Centre staff who serve with us. I am grateful too for the prayers and support of many who share Bridge Builders' vision. Grace and peace to you.

Alastair McKay

A great course which all leaders should attend it. Thank you very much for your friendly way of sharing your knowledge and experiences.

Revd Peter Streatfeild
Anglican priest commenting on a POT training weekend for the Diocese of Carlisle

The day was very worthwhile, and I would very much recommend it to others.

Sr Paula Terroni
Catholic sister commenting on a workshop for provincials of the Faithful Companions of Jesus

The course gave us good tools to use and is a practical way for us to learn to handle conflict well as Christians.

Revd Sandy Southee
Anglican priest commenting on a workshop for clergy from the Diocese of Chelmsford

This is very useful and valuable training to have, not just for church life but to use in everyday situations.

Brenda Sims
Commenting on a workshop for Belle Vue Baptist Church, Essex

The workshop helped to show areas in myself which need to be worked on. It also made me realise that you can deal with conflict in a positive way. Differences of opinions are natural and can be resolved.

Gloria Chandra
Commenting on a workshop for the Parish of Upper Holloway, North London

Sowing the seed – training and education

Vision and goals

The vision set out in our Development Plan is to transform the understanding of conflict in church life so that Christians are able to invite disagreement, and positively engage with their differences. The objective is therefore to equip Christians with the understanding, skills and processes to be effective in handling conflict in the church, and to train a body of church leaders who can model and promote this vision.

We set a goal of introducing 1,000 church leaders and members to new ways of thinking about and dealing with church conflict through our training events, between January 2000 and December 2004.

Performance in 2003

Bridge Builders held 21 training events around the country ranging from one-day to four-day courses. In total, over 530 people participated in these events. The vast majority were ordained and lay church leaders. The groups included: Anglican clergy from the Dioceses of Birmingham, Carlisle, Chelmsford, and Durham; Baptist district ministers from London; provincials from a Catholic order of sisters; and Anglican, Baptist, URC and Methodist students from several different theological colleges. Activity was significantly greater than any previous year, and meant that we exceeded our Development Plan target of reaching 1,000 people more than a year ahead of schedule.

In addition, the Director tutored a year-long MA module for the Missionary Institute London, accredited by Middlesex University. There were three students in 2002-2003, all of whom successfully completed the module, and another student who audited the class.



Participant discussion during workshop for CPAS Arrow leadership programme

Comments from participants in our mediation skills training courses in 2003:

The course provided solid grounding in the foundational principles and skills required for handling conflict constructively and creatively, so that conflict is no longer a threat, but a welcome opportunity to grow personally, and develop deeper, stronger relationships.

Paul Stockley
Consultant to Christian charities, Oxford

This is an excellent course for all those who work with people! It provides opportunity for personal reflection as well as personal skills, growth and development.

Revd Steve Mantle
Baptist Regional Minister, Nottingham

This course should be integral to ministerial training. It has given me invaluable insight into the issues surrounding conflict, but more importantly has helped raise my self-awareness, and therefore my effectiveness in mediation.

Revd Nicola Sullivan
Bishop's Chaplain, Anglican Diocese of Bath and Wells

The course gave me some excellent practical skills at dealing with some of the most sensitive areas of church life. It also got me excited about being part of a healing process for wounded people and churches!

John Hennings
Franciscan brother, Doncaster

Preparing the hands – mediation training and mediators’ network

Vision and goals

The vision set out in our Development Plan is to equip a body of Christians from all the main denominations in Britain to be able to serve as mediators in local church settings, and to mentor and support a network of trained mediators who can respond to situations of church conflict.

We set a goal of training 250 people as mediators between January 2000 and December 2004, and holding 10 follow-up training days for the Mediators’ Network in the same period.

Performance in 2003

We held two week-long intensive mediation skills training courses in 2003. They were attended by a total of 56 people, mainly church leaders from a variety of different denominations. We again held one of these courses outside London, in Bristol. This is as part of a commitment to giving access to people across the country, and to developing regional networks. We are on track to meet our goal in this area.

In addition, we held a new course entitled *Congregational Conflict Consulting*, led jointly with David Brubaker, a US Mennonite trainer. This course was designed for those who had previously attended the mediation skills training, to equip them for the more challenging and advanced role of working with a whole congregation or large group facing significant conflict. We were pleased to have a full house of 20 participants for this four-day course.

Our Mediators’ Network continued to grow, with 104 paying members, 21 up on 2002. This ecumenical Network provides ongoing training for those who have completed the mediation course, and it is exciting to see friendships growing and collaboration happening between people in the Network. Over time, this may prove one of our most significant initiatives. Three Network training days were held in London and three were held in Leeds, with a total of 74 participants over all six days.



Mediation training course participants in Bristol

Comments from five participants in a congregational healing and reconciliation process led by Bridge Builders:

This was a bonding experience for the congregation.

I would highly recommend this process, especially if people are aware of the need for reconciliation or healing.

The process provided an opportunity to get to understand each other better, and created a climate of more openness and honesty.

I highly recommend this process. It is very good, being presented in a safe and non-threatening way; people who are new to looking at conflict can begin to explore this difficult area and feel good about it.

As a church we have taken a new turn; we are not the same. I feel we have been and are being released and enabled to focus our energies on growth and looking to the future.

Building Bridges – mediation and consultancy services

Vision and goals

The vision set out in our Development Plan is to offer mediation and consultancy services in response to difficult cases of church conflict. The objective is to function as a small centre of excellence for serving British churches in this way.

We set a goal of conducting between five and ten congregational intervention or consultancy cases between January 2000 and December 2004. We also hope to handle at least three inter-personal mediation cases a year.

Performance in 2003

With such a heavy demand for our training services, there was little space for taking on mediation work in 2003. In addition, the number of requests was lower than in the past. As a result, Bridge Builders led only three different inter-personal mediation sessions. One was the final session of a process begun in 2002, which saw the two ministers agreeing to cease working alongside one another, but ending in a much more constructive way than might otherwise have been the case.

Bridge Builders led a congregational process of healing and reconciliation for a small congregation in London in 2003. The process began with a training workshop and then involved five sessions, including looking at the church's history, taking steps to let go of past hurts, and exploring the future by working with different images of the church. The process was well received, and comments from some of the participants are shown opposite. There were five other enquiries for congregational interventions which were not taken further. In all our mediation work, our practice continues to be one of co-mediating, and the Director worked with three different members of the Mediators' Network on the above cases.

2003 also saw members of our Mediators' Network working on cases together, with at least one successful mediation, involving two mediators from different denominations working together. Another new development in 2003 was requests for individual clergy coaching. Bridge Builders provided coaching in handling conflict for a Baptist minister over two sessions and a URC minister over three, with positive feedback.



Some of the LMC staff in 2003

The church is called to be a culture shaped by the God we worship and the story we tell. We are not called to be against culture; our life and witness will inevitably take cultural form. But we have an exciting destiny – to become not a moral majority but a prophetic minority. ...

For the church to make a contribution to the healing of the world, we must allow God to change us, its members. ... God invites us, in Christ, to accept his peace and to learn how to be peacemakers. ...

We won't do this by avoiding conflict. We will do it by developing reflexes that enable us to deal with conflict positively and hopefully. Through Christ God has made peace with us; and he wants to equip us to make peace with each other – and through this to become peacemakers in the world. The church has nothing to offer the world other than what it has learned in its own “domestic” life.

Alan Kreider writing in
Becoming a Peace Church
(New Ground, 2000)
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Funding the work – financial report

Bridge Builders is grateful to the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for its continued support in 2003, as well as to a number of individuals who gave a regular gift, or give by standing order. Approaches to a few grant-giving charitable trusts at the end of 2002 did not yield any fruit last year.

Set out below is a financial summary of expenditure and income for 2003, with the budget for 2004. This summary does not take account of the London Mennonite Trust's (LMT) core fixed costs. Full audited accounts for the LMT, of which Bridge Builders is part, are available on request.

Bridge Builders again ran a deficit in 2003. While income rose by nearly £6,000 on 2002, costs also rose more than expected.

A break-even budget is projected for 2004.

Financial summary

	2003 Actual	2004 Budget
COSTS	£	£
Director's salary and NI	24,724	25,500
External trainers' fees	7,349	5,500
Printing, publicity and stationery	3,434	3,700
Travel and expenses	2,027	2,500
Training and related costs	4,724	5,300
TOTAL COSTS	42,258	42,500
INCOME	£	£
Fee income	33,936	36,500
Charged travel and expenses	2,572	3,000
Grant: MCC	2,300	2,000
Donations: individuals	881	1,000
TOTAL INCOME	39,689	42,500
Surplus/Deficit	- 2,569	0

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The London Mennonite Centre
Photo by Martin Atkinson

Bridge Builders

Transforming church conflict
A programme of the
London Mennonite Centre

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Assistant

Charletta Erb

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