



Seeking to become a peace Church

Bridge Builders
Annual Report 2002



Alastair McKay leading training
for the Diocese of Durham
photo by Trevor Hubble

Director's foreword

I write this at a time when some of the church in England is publicly in conflict, with differences over human sexuality as the presenting issue. In part the argument is about what constitutes faithful Christian discipleship, and what standards of discipleship are expected from ordained ministers – especially senior church leaders.

I see this conflict as important because it offers an opportunity for Christians to face together difficult questions about what it means to follow Jesus faithfully today in our society, as well as testing the church's capacity to be an international and cross-cultural community. This conflict also highlights the struggles that Christians have in engaging constructively over challenging issues. And, in the adverse publicity, I read a longing on the part of many that the church should model creative ways to address differences that can divide us. Our world needs this, as shown by the British and American governments' use of violent methods in Iraq without UN support.

As with other conflicts, this one in the church offers the opportunity to find new ways to engage with each other: ways that promote dialogue not debate, that build understanding rather than barriers. We will still need to make decisions on policies and principles, and on individual cases. But we can find better ways of reaching those decisions, of engaging with one another in the church and discerning what we understand as God's will. In so doing we will discover new things about ourselves, about others, and about God's love and truth, mercy and justice. That is my prayer and hope for the church in Britain, and beyond.

This Annual Report for 2002, the second of its kind, records further progress in achieving the vision and goals set out in Bridge Builders' year 2000 Development Plan. It also shows the persistent need for a co-worker to share the load with me. Insufficient support from grant-giving trusts means that we cannot afford to recruit someone. And efforts to secure a secondment from a major denomination in England were hit by the financial difficulties facing the churches.

However, a third option has now borne fruit: in January 2004 we expect to welcome a US Mennonite volunteer, Charletta Erb, following her graduation from Goshen College. While Charletta does not meet our objective of building greater British capacity, she comes with relevant interests and experience – and highly recommended by US friends of Bridge Builders. I am delighted that she has agreed to join us in London, for at least a year, and hopefully longer. I give much thanks to God, and eagerly await Charletta's arrival.

Finally I am most grateful to God that my wife Sue seems to have made a full recovery from cancer, and from the surgeries and treatment she underwent in 2002, and would like to thank all those who have prayed for her and our family.

Alastair McKay

This is one of the most important days for any church leader, as conflict will always be there in the church.

Revd Shaun Lambert
Baptist minister from Middlesex, commenting on a one-day workshop for his congregation's leadership team

I would recommend the course to anyone engaged in work with groups or communities, especially if they have some pastoral or ministerial responsibility.

Revd John Roland McManners
Anglican priest from Sunderland, commenting on a 48-hour Post-Ordination Training course

Attend! All Christians could benefit from attending this course.

Paul Gardner
from Kent, commenting on a one-day workshop for the South East Institute for Theological Education

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 2002

Bridge Builders held nine training events around the country ranging from eight-session courses spread over three days to half-day training sessions. Six of these events were day-long training workshops. In total, over 170 people participated in these events. The vast majority were ordained and lay church leaders. The groups included Anglican curates from the Diocese of Durham, district ministers from the London Baptist Association and students from the Cambridge Theological Federation. Due to the Director's personal circumstances, three courses had to be postponed to later dates, and activity overall was lower than 2001 – but we remain on track to meet our target.

We also hosted an outstanding and inspirational course on *Transforming Conflict Across Cultures* led by David Augsburger, a renowned US Mennonite teacher. We were disappointed that only 14 of the 20 available places were taken up for this five-day course.

In addition, the Director tutored a year-long MA module of mostly international students at the Missionary Institute London, accredited by Middlesex University. There were five students in the academic year 2001-2002 and four in 2002-2003, all of whom successfully completed the module.



Training course participants working in pairs

Comments from participants in our mediation skills training courses in 2002:

An excellent introduction to a good mediation process, well modelled by people who clearly love and understand the church.

Revd Elizabeth Caswell
URC Moderator, Eastern Synod, Cambridge

The course is challenging, enriching and great fun. You will be equipped to engage with conflict in new and deeper ways, both in yourself and with others.

Revd Nigel Coles
Baptist Regional Minister, Bristol

The course is hugely useful as the skills can be applied at any level and not just in personal interactions, whether you will act as a mediator in future or not.

Sue Jackson
Connexional Secretary, Methodist Church, London

An excellent context in which to develop understanding of interpersonal tension, and skills for dealing with it.

Revd Julia Mourant
CME Adviser, Anglican Diocese of Chelmsford

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 2002

For the third year, we held two week-long intensive mediation skills training courses. They were attended by a total of 45 people, mainly church leaders from a variety of different denominations. We again held one of these courses outside London, in York, a pattern that is now firmly established. We continue to bring over experienced North American Mennonite trainers to co-lead these courses with the Director. We are set to meet our goals in this area.

Our Mediators’ Network continued to grow, with 83 paying members, 30 up on 2001. This ecumenical Network provides ongoing training for those who have completed the mediation course, and the opportunity for fellowship with others committed to peacemaking in the church. Two Network training days were held in London (one was cancelled due to the Director’s personal circumstances), and a new Mediators’ Network in the North was launched in 2002 with three training days held in Leeds amid strong interest.



Alastair McKay and Richard Blackburn leading

Despite the forces at work which seem to have marginalised the church, we stand today faced with a great new opportunity to speak the good news of Christ into our culture by the way we live that truth in the life of the local church ...

There are hungers in our society that make the life of the church at least potentially of great significance ... There is a great hunger for relationships today ... There is also a great hunger for demonstration today ... People want to see whether it works. The church is called to be the pilot project of the new humanity established by Christ ... Not least is the world looking for models of handling conflict ...

Conflicts in the church can seem such a distraction from getting on with the real work; but *this is the real work*. When people come near such a community they will instinctively know how real the relationships are.

Revd Canon Robert Warren
then the Church of England's National Officer
for Evangelism, writing in
Being Human, Being Church
(Zondervan, 1995)

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Building Bridges – mediation 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 2002

Bridge Builders led eight mediation sessions relating to four different inter-personal mediation cases. These ranged from a case completed in one session concluding with an informal agreement, to a complex case that eventually involved five sessions and was not concluded until 2003. Of the three other cases: one was an employment case where the mediation clarified that the situation had moved beyond restoration of relationship, and identified the need to agree separation terms through solicitors; the other two reached positive conclusions or written agreements. There were another five serious enquiries for mediation which did not proceed because one side was unwilling to engage with the process.

Bridge Builders concluded the final stages of a congregational intervention process for a church in London as explained in the 2001 annual report. As well as limited demand, the Director's personal circumstances worked against taking on further congregational cases in 2002, although presentations were made to two churches without the process being taken up. The Director offered process design advice on a regional-wide listening and review process for a denominational office where a person's employment contract was ended, and then referred the case on to two members of our Mediators' Network who took the process forward, working independently of Bridge Builders.

Our practice is always to co-mediate, and the Director worked with five different members of the Mediators' Network on the inter-personal cases, and three members of the Network on the congregational case.



Small group role play during training in York

Bridge Builders will perform an enormously valuable task in the future life of the church enabling parishes and communities to resolve conflicts and to make reconciliation a priority not only of their theology but also of their practice. I commend their work to those churches who are experiencing difficulties, and those churches who think that they are not: we all need greater skills in conflict resolution and community development. Bridge Builders can help in this task.

Rt Revd Peter B Price
Bishop of Bath and Wells

I have found Bridge Builders to hold an exciting vision for the development of peacemaking in our churches. I also believe that Bridge Builders has a significant role to play as we seek to build up the church to be a more effective mission agent in 21st century Britain. I hope that others will catch the vision for this peacemaking work, and will support Bridge Builders' activities.

Revd Ernie Whalley
Regional Minister, Yorkshire Baptist Association

Funding the work – financial report

Bridge Builders is grateful to the Mennonite Central Committee and W.F. Southall Trust for their continued support in 2002, as well as to a number of individuals who gave a regular gift, or give by standing order.

Set out below is a financial summary of expenditure and income for 2002, with the budget for 2003. 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.

As anticipated in the 2001 annual report, Bridge Builders made a slight loss in 2002. This reflects the lower level of activity that the Director was able to sustain, given his personal circumstances. We expect Bridge Builders to return to surplus in 2003.

At the close of 2002, Bridge Builders re-approached a small number of grant-giving charitable trusts. Given the financial pressures affecting all trusts, we do not anticipate this yielding much fruit in 2003. However, we trust that God will provide the resources for the services we offer, if they are helping to strengthen his church and build his kingdom here on earth.

Financial summary

	2002 Actual £	2003 Budget £
COSTS		
Director's salary and on-costs (NI etc.)	24,523	25,400
External trainers' fees	4,278	5,000
Printing, publicity & stationery	2,341	2,200
Travel and expenses	3,451	3,500
Training and related costs	1,469	1,500
TOTAL COSTS	36,062	37,600
INCOME		
Fee income (training and mediation)	27,925	31,000
Charged travel & expenses	1,363	2,000
Grants: UK charitable trusts	1,500	2,000
Grant: Mennonite Central Committee	2,350	2,300
Donations: individuals	866	1,000
TOTAL INCOME	34,004	38,300
Surplus / Deficit	- 2,058	+ 700



The LMC garden and prayer hut

Bridge Builders

Transforming church conflict
A programme of the
London Mennonite Centre

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Alastair McKay

Council of Reference
Marigold Bentley
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Revd Canon Christopher Burch
Revd Elizabeth Caswell
Andrew Clark
Most Revd & Rt Hon David Hope
John Paul Lederach
Rt Revd Peter Price
Revd Dr Lance Stone
Revd Ernie Whalley
Rt Revd Frank White
Lilamani Wickramaratne
Revd Dr Nigel Wright

Advisory Group
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Revd Carol Murray
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