



Anabaptist Network News

From mid-September to mid-November the Anabaptist Network and the Mennonite Trust are coordinating the visit of Canadian Mennonites, **Tom** and **Rebecca Yoder Neufeld** to the UK. We look forward to welcoming them and take some time to introduce them in this newsletter. Tom has also written an interesting article to get our minds thinking before they arrive!

There remain some spaces in their schedule. If you would like to invite them to meet you or speak at an event, please contact stuart@murraywilliams.co.uk.

Sue Haslehurst, who coordinates the Anabaptist Network of Communities, reports on the recent Network of Communities day in London.

It has been a busy spring, with the Anabaptist Network of Organisations day also taking place. **Cheryl Nimz**, who is volunteering with **Noel Moules** to support this network, reports on the day's activities.

These two events are a key focal point in the year for bringing together those with an interest in Anabaptism, as well as being an opportunity to introduce Anabaptist ideas to a new audience.

Mike and **Cheryl Nimz** continue to travel the country, connecting with individuals, organisations and communities and exploring connections with the Anabaptist tradition. Mike reports on their latest travels.

We continue to need financial support for the work Mike and Cheryl are doing. If you feel able to give, even just a little, it would be gratefully received. Please contact us using the details on this page to find out how.

There is also exciting news about a new Anabaptist Study Centre in Bristol as well as the usual news from organisations and book updates.

Upcoming Events

Everyone thinks they are openminded...until they meet someone they disagree with
With Rev Dr Simon Perry and Professor Richard Norman

Wednesday 2 July, 6pm
Union Chapel, London

Who Would Jesus Shoot?
With Prof. Nigel Biggar and Prof. Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld

Wednesday 12 November, 7pm
Union Chapel, London

Both events are FREE, but booking is required. Tickets can be ordered online, see the Anabaptist Network website for details.

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An Introduction to Tom and Rebecca Yoder Neufeld

Tom is Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies (New Testament), having retired at the end of 2012 from teaching at Conrad Grebel University College. Previously he served as a hospital and prison chaplain and as a pastor in small Mennonite congregations. He is a frequent speaker in seminar and conference settings. Among his writings are a commentary on Ephesians, a text book on Jesus (*Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament*), and more recently a book exploring the way violence intersects with the New Testament (*Jesus and the Subversion of Violence: Wrestling with the New Testament*). With respect to peace and the Bible, Tom believes that the topic extends beyond ethical questions related to violence, war and peace, to include themes such as ‘peace with God’, reconciliation with God through Christ’s witness, work, death and resurrection, and the church as Christ’s peacemaking body. Tom has written a piece for this newsletter, introducing some of his thinking.

Rebecca has spent much of her adult lifetime working with Latin American refugees and immigrants in the USA and Canada in the areas of settlement assistance, immigration advocacy, bilingual education and English teaching, as well as pastoring. For ten years she pastored the Latin American’ refugee community within her Mennonite congregation, where she is currently a lay leader. At an earlier time she exercised leadership roles in a student house church and a small congregation she and Tom helped start.

Tom and Rebecca will be based in Selly Oak, staying with Mike and Cheryl Nimz in Kreider House, but they will be travelling widely, speaking in churches, theological colleges, study groups and conferences. They will also be spending time informally with individuals. Their schedule will be posted on the Anabaptist Network and Mennonite Trust websites and in our newsletters. We encourage you to connect with them somewhere on their travels.

Patience and Pursuit: “hounds of peace”

by **Tom Yoder Neufeld**

‘Seek peace and pursue it!’ That imperative from Psalm 34:14 is taken up repeatedly in the New Testament. While having ‘peace with God’ (Rom 5:1) is both ground and goal of God’s reconciling the world to himself in Christ, each time that imperative is sounded it has to do with relationships among human beings, not least within the family of faith (Rom 14:19; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14; and in 1 Pet 3:11).

In common English usage ‘pursue’ is a strong word. We ‘pursue’ an argument; we ‘pursue’ a career or a love interest; police ‘pursue’ criminals. ‘Pursue’ implies a persistent going after something or someone. It is stronger yet in the Greek, however, where the term *diōkō* is translated also as ‘persecute’. We find a wonderful word play in Romans 12:13–14, one regrettably obscured by translators. Paul enjoins his readers to literally ‘pursue’ (*diōkō*) the love of strangers (*philoxenia*). In the immediately following verse Paul calls on his readers to bless those who ‘persecute’ (*diōkō*) them, as all translations have it. In other words, the relentless, dogged and resourceful persistence of a persecutor is to mark the energy with which we are to pursue peace—to ‘persecute’ strangers, even enemies, with love and blessing.

Perhaps this kind of ‘loving persecution’ accounts for the peculiar way in which the imagery of militancy, even violence, appears at points where we as followers of and believers in Jesus are summoned to the love of strangers and enemies. Jesus asked his followers to take up their cross (Matt 16:24 par.), which would have been heard by them as being ordered to deliberately place themselves in the crosshairs of imperial violence, even if it costs them their lives. Remarkably, his own death on the cross becomes Jesus’ own weapon by which he ‘kills the enmity’ (Eph 2:16) between humans and God and each other. Paul asks his Roman readers to ‘put

on the weapons of light', that is, to 'put on Christ' (Rom 13:12, 14), in effect to put on the one 'who is our peace' (Eph 2:14). Vis-à-vis the arrogance of imperial 'Peace and Security' (1 Thess 5:3), Paul evokes the warrior God of Isaiah 59 who in response to violence and oppression puts on the breastplate of justice and the helmet of salvation or liberation. Only now that armour is to be worn by the frightened and overwhelmed ekklēsia in Thessalonika, 'wielding' what has now become the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of liberation (5:8). To that very same armour Ephesians 6:15 tellingly adds the footwear of peace.

Militancy in the pursuit of peace, 'wielding' the ploughshares that have been beaten out of swords! As offensive as this language might be to our ears (just think what it sounds like when the weaponry is modernized), it leaves no doubt whatsoever that peace is not simply to be affirmed and welcomed (something already difficult in many circles), but relentlessly pursued — 'waged'.

It may come as a surprise then that alongside the vocabulary of militant pursuit is what seems at first blush to be the exact opposite of pursuit, namely, patience or long-suffering, a patience with so much stretch that it as often as not scandalizes those suffering injustice and violence. 'How long, O Lord!' ask (or accuse!) the martyrs of Revelation 6:10. It is that baffling patience that lies behind the 'irresponsibility' of God raising the sun on the just and the unjust, of pouring life-giving rain on the just and the unjust (Matt 5:45), giving them, in the eyes of those suffering injustice and violence, just another day to wreak their havoc. Rather than a disengaged universalism, this patience, insists Jesus, is the relentlessly patient love of enemies. As 2 Peter 3:8, 9, 15 reminds us, such patience is intended to open the future for repentance, that is, for turning, for transformation, for reconciliation, for peace. As Matthew 5 reminds us in no uncertain terms, if we wish to be sons and daughters of such a divine parent, we have no alternative but to practise precisely such patience ourselves. Patience and pursuit: perhaps it is the

hunter who best combines the two into one. In Francis Thompson's famous poem, the 'hound of heaven' pursues with unrelenting persistence, but also with 'unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace'. We too are asked to pursue peace, to pursue strangers and enemy with the offer of God's peace. Even such pursuit will require of the patience of turning the cheek, walking the second mile (Matt 5:39—42), and forgiving seventy times seven (Matt 18:22). That is not 'non-resistance'. It is, rather, the patience of the hounds of peace, breath-takingly patient, but hungry and ready to pounce in order to 'kill enmity', to transform hostility into hospitality, strangers and enemies into members of God's own household (Eph 2:11—22).

The followers of Jesus are to be a community on the hunt, patiently stalking their enemies with love, pouncing on every opportunity to make peace and to see to it that no one misses out on the grace of God (Heb 12:14—15).

More Visitors...

Garry Janzen is the conference minister of Mennonite Church British Columbia. He and his wife, Diane, are in the UK during September as part of his sabbatical. They hope to interact with Anabaptist Network members, among other things, especially between 13 and 30 September. This overlaps with Tom and Rebecca's time here.

If you would be interested in hosting them please contact us. Details on the front page.

Network of Communities

Sue Haslehurst reports on the recent Anabaptist Network of Communities gathering.

On Saturday 8 March, E1 Community Church (E1CC) hosted the annual gathering of the Anabaptist Network of Communities

(ANC) in London. As for past days in Birmingham and Manchester, much of the success and delight of the day was due to careful and creative planning and leading by the local hosts.

Just over thirty people gathered in a community hall in Shadwell, some having travelled from as far afield as Exeter and others from just round the corner. For those with a long history with the Anabaptist Network (AN), the day was a great opportunity for people to reconnect and catch up. For others it functioned as an Anabaptist taster day, quite literally as it turned out: the theme of the day was FOOD! and praise for the delicious soup served at our communion-lunch featured prominently in a third of the feedback.

Indeed it's been interesting that these ANC days, first conceived as a chance for ANC member communities to get to know each other, talk and worship together and swap stories, have also attracted a number of people from the wider AN as well as people not yet involved with the network but interested to find out more. They have also been an opportunity for the hosts to build on local connections by involving other individuals and groups in preparation and input. This has added greatly to the diversity of the days and the sense of excitement at learning new things and making new connections, an excitement which was very noticeable this year in both the breaks and the more structured parts of the programme. The pattern of moving the day around the country also allows more members of the host group to be involved than would have been able to travel to a day further from home. Five of the sixteen ANC communities were represented this year with two members of the AN steering group present, including the AN chair Martin Parkes.

The day started with an ingenious exercise which gave each person present a small part in the introduction to the theme and a chance to introduce ourselves. Many commented on how much they enjoyed the songs we sang together and the creative opportunities for prayer, including a

beautifully set meal table which challenged us to think about who is excluded from the table of our communities.

A highlight for many was the chance to hear from Kailean Khongsai of A Rocha UK about the interfaith community gardening project which A Rocha has nurtured near its base in Southall. Among the almost-impossible-to-choose-between options for the afternoon — and a great antidote to post-lunch drowsiness — was joining a working party on Shadwell's very own community gardening project a few minutes' walk away, The Shadpatch, started by Beth and Matt House. This is probably the first ANC day where "finding worms and potatoes" has featured (positively!) in feedback about the day. The other afternoon groups heard from Liz and Peter Anderson about "The Feast: Groundbreaking Interfaith Youth Work" (comment: "That Feast session was awesome") and from Elias Moyo of the Brethren in Christ Church congregation in Forest Gate about "A Divine Strategy for Community Building", a session from which people took away food for thought and inspiring stories.

It was a great day with space for quiet, worship, eating, thinking, doing and talking - lots of talking: many people stayed around after the end of the day to help clear up and continue chatting, a good indication of how much we had appreciated the chance to connect with each other and to imagine together what we could take home with us from the sessions and the conversations. Many thanks are due to E1CC and friends for making it all possible, bearing the costs not covered by donations and sending us away encouraged and excited.

New Birmingham Study Group

Mike and Cheryl Nimz have started a new study group in Birmingham. They are meeting on the first Sunday of every month at 6.30pm for a light meal and discussion.

If you would be interested in finding out more, please contact us, details on the front page.

Network of Organisations

Cheryl Nimz reports on the recent Anabaptist Network of Organisation event in London.

After several months of organising and connecting, the Anabaptist Network of Organisations met on 6 May at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in London. Originally over 29 organisations and 50 people had signed up for the day but with work commitments and a threat of a tube strike, 17 organisations and 30 people met.

The day started with introductions and saying what was on your heart at the moment. As we went around the room, it was soon apparent that the group had a commonality in their responses and it all came down to Shalom. From conservative to liberal, from activists to artists, the same theme resounded – we can make this world a better place by sharing Shalom.

The morning was based on open space discussions. People were asked to write down questions that were on their minds. The questions that came up were:

1. How do we encourage and participate in communities moving from being consumed by brokenness to seeking hope?
2. Changing the World: What kind of changes are we imagining? How does our faith in Christ inform and guide us to work toward this end?
3. Does fear of hell hinder the Christian movement? What if God doesn't want us or anyone to be damned?
4. How do we help young people identify and speak up against injustice?
5. What can we do to begin to break the hold of militarism and open minds to question that culture in the UK?
6. How do we read the Bible faithfully in its current context?
7. How do we do 100% honest faith/doubt etc.?

8. Is a gospel which accepts uncertainty the way out of the cultural commitment to dualism?
9. Big needs, time under pressure, limited energy – how do we make what we do life-giving and sustainable for us?

These questions were discussed in small groups and we had positive feedback.

After lunch, Suzi and Jess Humphries (part of the Freedom Guilt Equation) led us in a very contemplative time of worship with music. The very talented Andreas even joined in with his sax. Stuart Masters and Ruth Harris led us in Lectio Divina.

We then picked it up a notch and played Speed Connecting. We were asked two questions: What are three gifts that you have and what is one value that drives you? It was a fun way to get to know a bit about each other.

The feedback that we received was very positive. Some people said next year they would like to do more networking as organisations. Next year, we are looking forward to partnering with **Christian Peacemaking Teams**. It's going to be a fantastic event.

Bridge Builders

After two years of getting used to being our own charitable organisation, Bridge Builders is facing another year or two of huge change.

Our first news is that Alastair McKay, our founding Executive Director, is stepping down next year after 19 years. After a lengthy process of discernment and training, Alastair is following God's calling to him to be ordained in the Anglican Church – quite a step for him and Sue. He'll be leaving us at the end of March 2015 and taking 3 months for reflection and writing, before his ordination at the beginning of July. Do please pray for Alastair and his family – it will be a big change for all of them.

For us, it means we are looking for a new Executive Director to start in January. This will give her/him a 3-month overlap with Alastair, to ease the first bit of the learning curve. Please pray too for God's guidance and provision of the right person for this post – they will have a hard act to follow.

Our other news is that David Dadswell of Systems Leadership Consulting (and himself an ordained Christian minister) has sent us his consultancy report, which has some interesting and even surprising recommendations. We have not yet fully digested them, but we know that one of our first tasks is to revise and finalise our Business Plan. This will clarify to us what our priorities are, and clarify to potential funders what they can usefully help us with. None of it negates the need to pray and trust God – a clear business head and a trusting heart go together.

This spring we are launching another appeal for financial and prayer support, building on last year's successful appeal. We would like to reserve a sum for awarding Bursaries to church leaders, especially from small independent churches, who would otherwise not be able to come on one of our transformative training courses. If you are interested in this, or any other aspect of Bridge Builders' mission, please visit our website www.bbministries.org.uk.

Urban Expression

We are hoping to expand the scope of our activities in three ways over the next few months. In partnership with the East Midlands Baptist Association, we have appointed a development worker, Phil Warburton, to recruit and deploy teams in Nottingham (and maybe other cities in the region). During June, Juliet Kilpin and Stuart Murray Williams will be helping Mennonite Church Eastern Canada to set up an Urban Expression initiative in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. And Mike Pears has begun work as the founding director of Urban Life, a new urban mission training centre in Bristol. We are also continuing to offer, with partners including the Anabaptist Church of

the Brethren denomination, webinars (seminars presented via the internet) on various subjects, including pioneering, leadership and mission in marginal places. These are recorded, so let us know if you want to watch any of them. For more information, contact enquiries@urbanexpression.org.uk.

Crucible

We have recently completed the ninth year of the Crucible course. Once again, numbers have been good and feedback has been encouraging. Participants value not only the training they receive but also conversations over meals and in the breaks with others involved in pioneering, urban ministry and church planting. We continue to tweak the course in order to improve the experience, but the structure and ethos are now well established. A brochure about next year's course, starting in November, accompanies this newsletter. For more information, contact info@cruciblecourse.org.uk.

Speak

SPEAK is a grassroots network of Christians who are passionate about bringing justice to God's world. We do this through prayer, campaigns, thinking about our lifestyle choices and being creative.

The Speak network is currently exploring the issue of justice in our food system, through its Seeding Change campaign. The campaign is based on the premise that all food should be grown as though people and planet mattered.

At Soundcheck (SPEAK's annual gathering) 2014, we launched a new creative petition concerning an initiative called the New Alliance for Food Security in Africa. This is an initiative which is being headed up by the UK, through the Department for International Development (DfID). The petition is calling on DfID to stop spending UK aid money on funding landgrabs and locking poor people deeper into poverty.

We have fun and creative Seeding Change packs that we would love to send you so that you can share the campaign with your friends, family, colleagues and church. The packs contain creative activities, bee-friendly seeds and a wide array of other exciting activities. It will also give you the opportunity for your group to sign our petition to DfID.

With every signature for our petition we are also asking people to write a prayer on a seeded piece of paper calling for justice for African civil society. You can see prayers that have already been written by going to our facebook page: www.facebook.com/TheSpeakNetwork. We are then going to gather these prayers and plant a creative prayer garden, where every flower represents a prayer and a signature of someone who is standing up for justice.

To request a petition pack, containing information and the seeded paper sheets, please contact us at speak@speak.org.uk. We'd love to hear from you and look forward to more people joining us speaking out against injustice.

News and Events

Mike and Cheryl Nimz

The time passes quickly when one is with people. The time has been filled with people since the last newsletter. There have been visits and visitors, conferences and seminars, study groups, both visiting and starting.

Over the last few months, there have been guests at Kreider House. There have been friends and family, which has been great fun. There have also been guests from our home church in Canada. One of our more noted guests has been Poo, of *Cooking with Poo* cookbook fame. She was here in relation to Fellowship of Churches of Christ and the work that she is helping to do in one of the poorest areas of Bangkok. Poo was in the UK doing cooking classes and we had the chance to participate in one. We

cooked with Poo and we liked it! Although, I think Poo liked cooking with Cheryl even more.

There is a growing relationship with the Fellowship of Churches of Christ. Because of this, I was able to attend their National Leaders Conference. That was really a good time to meet pastors in the conference and learn more about the denomination, as a whole. It was also interesting to see how they are working on a growing understanding of Anabaptist thought and practice in their group of churches.

There have been other events that gave us time to meet new people. The Student Christian Movement let us have a table at their weekend conference in February. This allowed for connections to be made with Progressive Christian Network, Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Bruderhof. Connecting with the Bruderhof, an Anabaptist community, led to an invite to Darvel Community. A trip was made there in March and I am looking forward to making another trip there in the next couple of months. There was also a seminar on social activism in Birmingham, featuring Dave Andrews. Dave is connected to the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand.

There have been a couple of trips to Cornwall in the last few months. There is a new group starting there that is very excited about Anabaptist thought and practice. They are in the early phases of becoming a new church, which is quite exciting.

On the topic of study groups. I have had contact with a few of the people who are in active AN groups and some who were part of AN groups. It is understood that groups can have a lifecycle and that they will come and go. That being said, there is a new group started at Kreider House in Birmingham. It meets the first Sunday of each month. It has been well attended and looks to be quite engaging.

As summer comes, it is a good time to think about what things can happen this coming autumn. Are there people who are interested in starting new study groups? Are there groups looking for new ideas for their

existing groups? Are there people who are looking to join a group? As always, please feel free to contact me to see how I can help.

Centre for Anabaptist Studies

Over the summer the Mennonite Trust library will be moved from storage to its new home in Bristol Baptist College. In September the college will launch a new Centre for Anabaptist Studies, in partnership with the Anabaptist Network and the Mennonite Trust. Plans are still developing, but we anticipate that the Centre will:

- Sponsor public lectures
- Arrange webinars
- Offer postgraduate courses
- Produce learning resources
- Provide research supervision
- Develop links with other institutions

There will be further information in the next newsletter, but if you are interested to be kept in touch, please contact stuart@murraywilliams.co.uk. The Centre will not need much funding in the early stages, but some seed money would be very helpful. Is this something you might help with?

Books and Resources

The Naked Anabaptist

Those of you who are on Facebook might be interested to know that the 'Naked Anabaptist Facebook Group', which is hosted in Canada, has now reached 1,000 members.

The German translation of the book, *Nackter Glaube: Christsein in einer nachchristlichen Welt*, has also recently been published.

After Christendom series

Three further books in this series are scheduled for publication in 2015. The manuscripts are with the publisher and we await the appearance of:

Women and Men after Christendom by Fran Porter

Atheism after Christendom by Simon Perry

God after Christendom? by Brian Haymes and Kyle Gingerich-Hiebert

Other Books

Laura Brenneman and Brad Schantz (eds): *Struggles for Shalom: Peace and Violence across the Testaments* (Pickwick, 2014): a collection of essays by biblical scholars about peace, justice, and violence in ancient Jewish and Christian texts, written to honour the life work of Mennonite scholars, Perry B. Yoder and Willard M. Swartley.

John Roth (ed.): *Constantine Revisited* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013): a collection of essays responding to Peter Leithart's *Defending Constantine* and his advocacy of a restored Christendom.

Duane Stoltzfus: *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites during the Great War* (John Hopkins University Press, 2013): drawing on archive resources, tells the story of four young Hutterites imprisoned for refusing to fight in World War 1.

Albert Pleysier: *Henry VIII and the Anabaptists* (University Press of America, 2014): the story of Anabaptists in England and the intolerance they faced.

Guidelines Bible study notes for May—August 2014 (Bible Reading Fellowship): these include two sets of notes on war and peace – one from an Anabaptist perspective, the other written by an army chaplain.