



Anabaptist Network News

The Heart of Anabaptism: webinars

During 2015-16, in partnership with the Centre for Anabaptist Studies and the Mennonite Trust, we have arranged a series of webinars that will explore the 7 core convictions of the Anabaptist Network. We have asked presenters from different contexts (the UK, South Africa, Australia and North America) to reflect on these convictions, critique them and ask what they mean in practice. Each webinar will be an hour long and consist of presentation and discussion. The next four webinars are:



Monday 23 November (Alex Elish): 'Churches are called to be committed communities of discipleship and mission, places of friendship, mutual accountability and multi-voiced worship. As we eat together, sharing bread and wine, we sustain hope as we seek God's kingdom together. We are committed to nurturing and developing such churches, in which young and old are valued, leadership is consultative, roles are related to gifts rather than gender and baptism is for believers.'



Wednesday 2 December (Andrew Suderman): 'Western culture is slowly emerging from the Christendom era when church and state jointly presided over a society in which almost all were assumed to be Christian. As we reflect on this, we are committed to learning from the experience and perspectives of movements such as Anabaptism that rejected standard Christendom assumptions and pursued alternative ways of thinking and behaving.'



Thursday 14 January (Juliet Kilpin): 'The frequent association of the church with status, wealth and force is inappropriate for followers of Jesus and damages our witness. We are committed to vulnerability and to exploring ways of being good news to the poor, powerless and persecuted, aware that such discipleship may attract opposition, resulting in suffering and sometimes ultimately martyrdom.'



Thursday 11 February (Joanna Frew): 'Spirituality and economics are inter-connected. In an individualist and consumerist culture and in a world where economic injustice is rife, we are committed to finding ways of living simply, sharing generously, caring for creation and working for justice.'

To register for these webinars, go to www.brethren.org/webcasts. And to watch recordings of earlier webinars, go to www.brethren.org/webcasts/archive.html.

Events

7-8 November
Crucible course: 1st
weekend, Birmingham

18 November
Centre for Anabaptist
Studies annual lecture,
Bristol

23 November
Webinar 2: 'The Heart
of Anabaptism', with
Alex Elish

2 December
Webinar 3: 'The Heart
of Anabaptism', with
Andrew Suderman

14 January
Webinar 4: 'The Heart
of Anabaptism,' with
Juliet Kilpin

6-7 February
Crucible course: 2nd
weekend, Birmingham

11 February
Webinar 5: 'The Heart
of Anabaptism', with
Jo Frew

15-19 February
Centre for Anabaptist
Studies block week,
Bristol

12 March
'Can Enemies Become
Friends?' Conference
with David Porter,
London

11-15 April
Centre for Anabaptist
Studies block week,
Bristol

Networkers

The Anabaptist Network, in partnership with the Mennonite Trust, supports Alex Elish and Mike and Cheryl Nimz as networkers/development workers. Here are their current reports:

Alex Elish

In Pennsylvania this July I had the privilege of representing both the Mennonite Trust and the Anabaptist Network at the Mennonite World Conference. This was a fantastic opportunity to meet Mennonites and Anabaptists from all over the world. As I don't come from a Mennonite background and only know a few European Mennonites, it was helpful to build a bigger picture of the Mennonite church family as a movement and denomination. The breadth of the Anabaptist family struck me: from 'plain' people to Pink Menno activists; and the loving commitment of many groups and individuals to find ways to maintain good relationships despite huge differences was humbling to witness. (I also enjoyed watching the Amish young people whizz around the conference centre on their scooters, taking dough between the kitchens and kiosks to be made into delicious pretzels!)

The theme of the week was 'walking with God', and each evening featured a preacher and musical worship from one of the five continents represented. It was incredibly moving to sing (and dance!) in different styles and languages with Jesus-followers from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities.

Participating in the Global Anabaptist Network meeting before the MWC, I met Anabaptists from all the corners of the earth including the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, South Korea, Colombia, Sweden and South Africa. We spent time thinking about how we remain distinctive, how we connect with people who are interested in Anabaptism, and the importance of remaining embodied and rooted in Anabaptist history and the wider Anabaptist community of churches. It was a great time of conversation, learning and friendship-building.

What's coming up...?

Plans are afoot for a residential training on mediation and active non-violent peace-making skills...watch this space! There will also be a

gathering in the autumn for young(er) Anabaptists. Watch the Facebook pages for details of these events, or you can contact me by email at administrator@menno.org.uk.

As always, please do get in touch with me if you are under 40 (roughly) and would like a chance to chat about Mennonites/Anabaptism over a coffee.

Mike and Cheryl Nimz

As you are probably already used to reading, we have been quite busy. Even our August was busier than even we could expect. We have had opportunities to get out and visit people in many different places. Some of these have been long overdue and some have been opportunities to meet more new people to expand, at least in part, our understanding of the depth of faith in the UK. It has also shown us that the desire to learn about an Anabaptist understanding of Christianity is growing quite quickly.

One of the things we have learned in our time here is that if you make the effort to show up, to meet people and take interest in what they are doing, they are more likely to give what you say more value. Showing up also means that the people you encounter are important. This initial effort has provided so many more opportunities for us that we would never have known about and has expanded our connections more easily and in places we would never have found on our own.

Our connections brought us into contact with people like Baxter Kruger and Andre and Mary-Anne Rabe. These are names that you probably are not familiar with. They are theologians and teachers from a Charismatic or Pentecostal approach to Christianity. The invitations to hear them teach and worship with them have brought about connections with people who would be considered outside of church, people who are done with church. As one person so aptly put it, she has not left church; she has just stopped attending events, like Sundays. These are also people of deep faith, who see value in their Christian faith and are quite interested in an Anabaptist approach.

We are also being invited to other groups, some that are looking at new ways of being church. One event, which was called 'Beyond Church', happened in Devon in June. Another was the New Parish Conference, which took place in Birmingham. This was primarily sponsored by

the Fellowship of Churches of Christ. It was an interdenominational event in which Mike was asked to participate. It was exciting to be part of a panel discussion.

We also have a renewed connection with the Centre for Reconciliation/Barnes Close, where the Anabaptist Network held two residential conferences some years ago. Mike has been made a trustee for this group. This is an interdenominational group who all have a common desire to bring peace and reconciliation to this broken world.

We are looking forward to what the next few months bring. Please feel free to get in contact with us.

News and Events

Conference

'Can Enemies become Friends? Adventures in Reconciliation' is the title of a conference on 12 March at Bloomsbury Baptist Church in central London, organised by the Anabaptist Network. There will be workshops led by members of the Network and friends, and the main speaker will be David Porter, the archbishop of Canterbury's Director for Reconciliation. Details attached.

Netherlands Tour?

Several years ago Alan and Eleanor Kreider led a study tour of Anabaptist/Mennonite sites in the Netherlands. They are offering to do so again in 2016 (probably in late May) if there are enough people interested. We'll need to know soon in order to make arrangements, so please let us know as soon as possible if you are interested.

Study Groups

A new Anabaptist group began in September in **Belfast**. For details, contact Gordon McDade: gmcdade@btinternet.com.

Gordon McDade writes: We meet in the offices of Contemporary Christianity in the centre of the city and gather people from a wide area within Northern Ireland. Our inaugural meeting went

well with a lively discussion on 'what is an Anabaptist?' The gatherings will be informal and interactive with practical application to church and society. We are compiling a list of useful resources and are planning future meetings to consider other aspects of Anabaptism. We have a particular interest in the origins and history of the Anabaptist movement and we have already compiled some early Anabaptist writings that we can explore at future meetings of the group.

Our aspiration is that the group, which will meet monthly, will grow as more people join us for what we believe will be an informative and exciting journey. We see the group as being a gathering place for those with an Anabaptist identity, whatever denomination or stream they see themselves as part of. We aim to build relationships and influence across the church here in the province and to continue to raise the profile and understanding of Anabaptism, which we believe has something relevant to contribute to our society in Northern Ireland as we seek to build peace and strengthen relationships. We intend to promote the group widely and to hold other events in the future. We hope that the history, principles and relevance of Anabaptism will be known and valued in Northern Ireland as our journey continues.

There is also interest in starting a group in the **Cambridge** area. Please contact us if this is of interest to you.

Network of Communities

Update

Sue Haslehurst (our ANC coordinator) writes: We have been thinking about the best ways to help members of the Anabaptist Network of Communities connect with each other. Since 2010, the main place of connection has been the annual ANC day, which we've held in North London, Birmingham, Manchester, East London and Bristol. We've found that these days have a wider appeal beyond the ANC and in particular have attracted people just beginning to explore Anabaptism.

In view of this, we're now planning to run days on themes of general interest which we hope will continue to draw in those from established ANC communities, those with other connections

with Anabaptism and, indeed, those without much contact but who want to attend, perhaps because they live locally. We'll aim to include some way of ANC members hearing from each other, but these days will not be publicised as specifically ANC gatherings.

The first of these days will be on 7 May 2016 at Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church, Birmingham. This will be a chance to reflect on the themes of suffering and martyrdom that are important in the Anabaptist tradition. The day is still under construction but we expect to be looking at the biblical material and talking about how churches can support and pastor those who are suffering. Further details will follow but if you are likely to want to attend, please note the date.

We've also been consulting with members of the ANC on other ways to connect. There was not much enthusiasm for our suggestion of facilitating online and virtual conversations, but we are still very keen to facilitate links between ANC groups. If you have other ideas for how this could happen, please let us know.

Finally, we are delighted to welcome Union Chapel, a Baptist church in Fallowfield, South Manchester, as a new member of the ANC – the congregation is profiled below.

Fallowfield Baptist Church

Ian Geere responds to questions from Sue:

Where are you based?

The church is in Fallowfield, on the south side of Manchester, where the urban and suburban begin to overlap. The area now has a large population of students living in halls and rental properties, but also in the mix are areas of deprived housing estates and modest owned housing. Historically the congregation were all local, whereas now we are a network of 30–40 people from all over the south of the city.

What are your main activities, expressions or gatherings and what happens at them?

In many ways we still look like a 'standard' Baptist church, complete with our traditional buildings, Sunday morning services, deacons, and so on. The people of Union Chapel have, however, developed a strong sense of political and community engagement, together with a radical and questioning approach to faith. The

church has a shortened time of 'traditional' worship on Sundays so time can be devoted to more informal sharing. This might be people sharing about their lives, visitors educating us about justice issues, developing our creativity, and generally growing together. Much of our shared life is in smaller groups which read or meditate or walk or watch films – according to what enriches them. We are blessed with a healthy diversity of gracious people who do not always (or even often) agree, but who have found a way of belonging around a shared commitment to being open and accepting.

When Manchester experienced the closure in the late 1980s of much of its adult education and leisure provision, the church established an organisation which has since become a registered charity and provides classes for over 300 people each term. In the recent years of austerity and cutbacks we have partnered with others to open a foodbank. Some of us would like to be free from the shackles of our buildings, but at present they are held in trust for the use of our local community, and they are used almost all day for seven days a week.

In what ways do you draw on the Anabaptist tradition?

Our annual church weekends present us with the opportunity to delve deeper into areas which interest us, and a few years ago, when we tackled *The Naked Anabaptist*, we were very taken with the principles it described. On a subsequent weekend Stuart came and talked with us about multi-voiced church and, whilst incredibly useful, we actually realised that we were already doing it!

Some of our number attend the Manchester Anabaptist Study Group, and materials from this group have made appearances in our services. We have adapted a version of Hubmaier's 16th-century communion service for our use, and many of us have benefitted hugely by reading (and preaching from) the 'After Christendom' series.

Less explicitly, we remain committed to hearing from everyone in our community; our decision-making is corporate and no one is excluded from any function of our community. We value a shared meal every month (and less formal ones in between!) and we take our responsibility on issues of justice and peace very seriously. The goal is that our faith, as individuals and a group, remains utterly integrated with everyday life.

What are your hopes for the Anabaptist Network of Communities?

We have experienced the network to be a valuable source of resources and ideas. Like most churches, our time and energy are limited and mainly focussed on local partnerships, but there remains a great need and desire to be enriched from both our dissenting tradition and those modelling church in very different ways. We hope that the network remains a place for sharing ideas and inspiration, where we can have bold conversations and where we can gain encouragement.

Network of Organisations

Mennonite Trust

The Mennonite Trust needs to find a couple of new trustees, especially people with expertise in financial or property management. Do you know anyone who might be interested in this? Might you be? Please contact the Trust if you have any ideas at administrator@menno.org.uk.

Anabaptist Theology Forum

Andrew Francis and **Trisha Dale** write: The dates for the next two Forums are: 6–7 April (within most academic holidays but not Easter week) and 3–4 November 2016. Both will take place at the International Mission Centre (IMC), Selly Oak, Birmingham, from coffee-time on the Wednesday until after lunch on the Thursday. Each will cost approximately £90 for residential attendees and there will be a day-visitor rate.

Each Forum's programme will be multi-themed. This will include plenary sessions and small-group discussions, as well as presentations on current Anabaptist-related topics and recently published books, worship and shared meals.

Regrettably, the autumn 2015 gathering had to be cancelled despite having a full programme as several regulars sent apologies (for good and differing reasons) and late-bookers were too late to meet IMC's booking deadline and to guarantee sufficient numbers to make the event viable. Please note that this deadline means that early booking is now vital, at the latest 21–28 days (dependent upon holidays) before the Forum.

Further details of the April conference will be e-mailed out in January 2016. So please join our mailing list for more information by contacting atf@menno.org.uk.

Centre for Anabaptist Studies

MA Modules

The Centre, based at Bristol Baptist College, is offering five MA modules:

- * Anabaptist Origins and Distinctives
- * Anabaptist Ecclesiology and Missiology
- * Anabaptist Ethics and Hermeneutics
- * Study of a Christian Figure: Pilgram Marpeck
- * Study of a Text: Menno Simons' *Foundation of Christian Doctrine*

The MA can be taken over 1, 2 or 3 years. And a Postgraduate Diploma will also be available, consisting of the taught elements of the MA without the dissertation. In addition, any of the modules can simply be studied for interest.

The modules will be taught in two modes: in block weeks to enable students living some distance from the college to attend, and online for students beyond reach of the college. The first two modules will be taught on the following dates: February 15-19: *Anabaptist Origins and Distinctives*; April 11-15: *Anabaptist Ethics and Hermeneutics*.

Annual lecture

The second annual lecture on 'Anabaptists, the Bible and Discipleship' will be on Wednesday 18 November. The lecture will be given by Dr Toivo Pilli. Please see the flyer about this event for details. All welcome!

The inaugural lecture on 'Anabaptists, the Bible and Violence' was given by Tom Yoder Neufeld. An audio recording of this lecture is available on request.

Research Supervision

Bristol Baptist College offers postgraduate research supervision (MPhil, MLitt and PhD). The director and associates of the Centre will offer supervision of research topics related to the Anabaptist tradition.

For further information about any aspect of the Centre please contact: Stuart Murray Williams, Centre for Anabaptist Studies, Bristol Baptist College, The Promenade, Bristol BS8 3NJ or at anabaptist@bristol-baptist.ac.uk. The Centre

also has a Facebook group and a blog at www.facebook.com/groups/anabaptiststudies, and <http://anabaptiststudies.wordpress.com>.

Bridge Builders

Chris Burch (chair of trustees) writes: In the last newsletter, I reported that we are beginning to see the benefits of all the changes in the last four years or so. As well as a new executive director (Colin Moulds) and course coordinator (Catherine Ellerby), we have a newish treasurer (Graham Shorter) who's got a good handle on our finances and is part of the group preparing our business plan. We also have a new trustee (Aidan Melville) who brings communications and marketing skills. We've not been all that good in the past at getting the word out there, so we're especially pleased that Aidan's joined us.

Bridge Builders has a new vision statement, which those who've been around a while will recognise as having its roots in the vision of the London Mennonite Centre back in the day – to influence the British churches with Anabaptist values and ideas. Our vision is *to help facilitate a change in the culture of churches and church organisations in the UK towards a positive and creative handling of conflict, transforming it into reconciliation and healing*.

This is a change of emphasis from an activity-centred model, based on delivering excellent training courses, to an outcome-centred model, seeking a change in the culture of the churches.

I am repeating here an invitation I made in the previous newsletter: 'Those in leadership in small Anabaptist-inspired churches are warmly invited to apply to one of our training courses, *Transforming Church Conflict* or *Leading with Emotional Maturity*. We now have a bursary fund, so if your church isn't able to sponsor you, do get in touch anyway. Visit our website for the course programme and application details: go to: www.bbministries.org.uk.'

Please pray for us:

- For our new staff and trustees to settle in and flourish, and for the recruitment of a new assistant director when Colin Patterson retires in 2017;
- For Catherine's daughter Evie (10) who developed multiple serious illnesses and nearly died (though she is now on the mend): a worrying time for her family

and Catherine has had to take time off work, putting extra pressure on the small staff team.

- For us to respond to the twin challenges of fulfilling our vision (which we believe is from God, and eventually will see us working ourselves out of a job) and staying afloat as an organisation until the vision is fulfilled.

Urban Expression

We are grateful to the Mennonite Trust for their purchase of two houses (in Hackney and Harold Hill) for the use of our mission teams. Houses in these areas are too expensive for the teams to afford to rent otherwise, so these are valuable assets that will enable long-term mission here.

The scope of our activities continues to grow as we anticipate welcoming new teams in Ireland, Wales and possibly Scotland over the next few months, as well as in other English locations, including the north-east. The opportunities are vast, as are the many challenges of ministry in marginal places in a time of austerity, so we are continuing to pray for team members to form or join teams.

Further information on UE can be obtained by contacting enquiries@urbanexpression.org.uk.

Crucible

The eleventh year of the *Crucible* course begins on 7-8 November in Birmingham – a course for pioneers and anyone interested in mission on the margins in post-Christendom. There will be two further weekends in February and May.

Details at www.cruciblecourse.org.uk. Bursaries are available in case of financial difficulties.

CPT

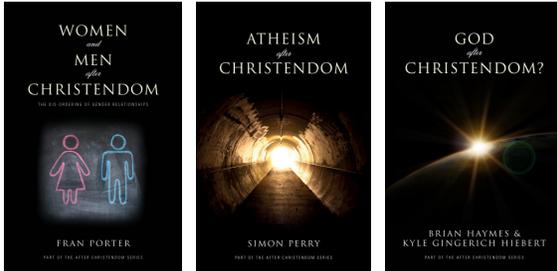
Ruth Wilde writes: CPT UK is up and running again, bringing together supporters and friends of Christian Peacemaker Teams in the UK.

For information, check out our twitter account here: https://twitter.com/CPT_utdkingdom and our Facebook page, which can be found here: www.facebook.com/ChristianPeacemakerTeamSUK.

Books and Resources

'After Christendom' series

Three further titles have now been published.



The authors have provided brief summaries to whet our appetites:

Women and Men after Christendom

This book argues for Christian understanding and practice that takes the hierarchy out of gender relationships. It demonstrates how the structures and mindsets of male dominance and female subordination have been and still are being perpetuated, and offers an alternative understanding rooted in biblical and theological reflection.

From the gospel witness and lives of the first Christians, through the patriarchal gender order of Christendom, to the challenges of equality movements, and the impact of our theological imagination on the social relations between women and men, this book traces how unequal gender power relations are entangled and defied, inviting Christian communities to explore non-hierarchical ways of relating.

Atheism after Christendom

To be atheist is to reject the gods of the age. Throughout Western history, those gods have included: the gods of Greece, whom Socrates opposed and was hence executed on the charge of 'atheism'; Roman Emperors, gods whom Jews and Christians resisted and were hence persecuted as 'atheists'; the pseudo-Christian god of Christendom, against whom Christian groups like Donatists, Waldensians, Lollards and Anabaptists rebelled and were outlawed as 'atheists'. The god of Christendom was eventually pronounced dead by Friedrich Nietzsche. Since then, atheists have continued to rebel against this defunct god.

Now that we live in a post-Christendom era, New Atheists boldly oppose the god of a bygone age whilst dutifully worshipping the gods of our own age. This book is a call to both atheist and Christian, to be faithful to their atheistic heritage.

God after Christendom?

Whatever is happening in history, whatever deals are struck between Church and State, whether Christians are influential or vulnerable in society, marginal or in power, God remains God and that is good news. At least it is so long as God remains God and not some being, even a Supreme Being, made in our image.

This book revisits the tradition of Christian speech about God in the conviction that in Scripture and the story of Christian reflection there are resources to help keep the church in the way of faithful discipleship, in the face of contemporary temptation to focus on who or what is less than God.

Beginning with the Bible, the two authors explore some classic Christian affirmations and why they remain crucial, and reflect on how we now speak of God, facing issues of suffering and evil, and why faith in the true God must always lead to worship and peace.

Extracts from these three books can be found at www.anabaptistnetwork.com/AfterChristendom. Please contact us if you would like copies of any of the books (£14.99, post-free in the UK).

Foxes Have Holes: support is requested

You may be aware that Ekklesia, the Christian think-tank, has begun publishing books on a variety of discipleship-related social policy topics.

They are planning to publish (around Easter 2016) a book entitled *Foxes Have Holes: Christian Reflections upon Britain's Housing Need*, co-edited by Andrew Francis and Trisha Dale, co-convenors of the Anabaptist Theology Forum. Several contributors are both housing experts and well known within the Anabaptist Network; including Sean Gardiner (Wood Green Mennonite Church), Chris Horton (Workshop) and Helen Roe (Mennonite Trust).

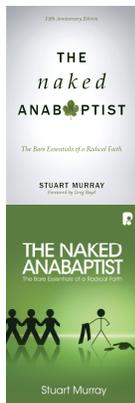
Ekklesia are 'crowdfunding' *Foxes Have Holes*, and you can find out more about this initiative at <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/foxes-have->

[holes#](#). Alternatively, you can watch a video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=eR_c2zqREXY&feature=youtu.be. Why not add your support to this important debate?

Book Notes

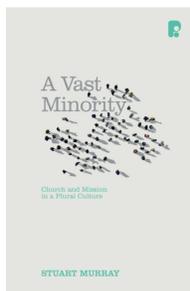
You might be interested in the following books that have recently been published:

***The Naked Anabaptist* (revised edition)**



A revised edition to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the publication of *The Naked Anabaptist* will be available from mid-October. The book has sold very well in North America (despite being aimed at a British readership) and Herald Press believes that a revised and Americanised edition can reach an even wider readership. Copies of the original book are available at £8.00 (post free in the UK) on request.

A Vast Minority



A spin-off from the 'After Christendom' series, this book explores the significance of the Christian community in Britain today not only being a minority in a plural culture but an ex-majority community. It can be supplied (post-free in the UK) for £9.99.

Other books of interest

Stanley Green & James Krabill: *Fully Engaged: missional church in an Anabaptist voice* (Herald 2015): a collection of resources on Anabaptist contributions to contemporary missiology.

Gerald Gerbrandt: *Deuteronomy* (Herald Press 2015): another volume in the Believers Church series of commentaries.

David Whitford: *A Reformation Life: The European Reformation through the Eyes of Philipp of Hesse* (Praeger 2015): a study of an unusually tolerant Protestant prince, including a

chapter on the Radical Reformation.

Karl Koop & Mary Schertz (Eds.): *Without Spot or Wrinkle* (Wipf & Stock 2015): papers from a recent Mennonite conference on ecclesiology.

Fernando Enns (Ed.): *Mennonites in Dialogue: Official Reports from International and National Ecumenical Encounters, 1975-2012* (Pickwick 2015): the title is self-explanatory!

Ronald Sider: *Nonviolent Action* (Brazos, 2015): the subtitle is 'what Christian ethics demands but most Christians have never really tried.'

Lisa Weaver & J Denny Weaver: *Living the Anabaptist Story: A Guide to Early Beginnings with Questions for Today* (Cascadia, 2015): an accessible overview of Anabaptist history and its contemporary significance.

Francis Ojwang: *Forward in Faith: History of the Kenya Mennonite Church* (CreateSpace, 2015): another self-explanatory title.

Philip Jenkins: *The Great and Holy War: How World War 1 Changed Religion for Ever* (Lion, 2015): argues that we cannot understand our present religious, political and cultural climate without understanding the dramatic changes initiated by the First World War.

John Driver: *Life Together in the Spirit: A Radical Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (Plough Publishing, 2016): due out in January.

Articles Wanted

We welcome articles on subjects that are likely to be of interest to readers. Please contact us in advance if you are unsure, or simply send in an article (up to 750 words) for consideration.

Contact Us

For further information about anything you have read in this newsletter, please contact us.

And if you have information or news items you would like included in the next newsletter, let us have these no later than **31 January 2016**.

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