



Anabaptist Network News

Planting Anabaptist Churches?

Every so often we receive an email via the Network's website asking if we can point the enquirer to 'the nearest Anabaptist church' to where they live. We find this a difficult question to answer and a persistent challenge. The Network has, since it began in 1991, concentrated on offering resources and connections to members of other churches, rather than planting Anabaptist churches.

We have operated with the concept of *hyphenated Anabaptists* – who belong to churches of various denominations but value the perspectives of the Anabaptist tradition. Our hope has been that these insights and practices will help all of us find ways of being church that are fruitful in a post-Christendom context.

But Anabaptism is an ecclesial tradition. Its perspectives need to be embodied, not just discussed. Maybe we do need to plant some 'Anabaptist churches'? A few years ago we developed an 'Anabaptist network of communities' as a step in this direction. The groups that comprise this network mostly do not designate themselves as 'Anabaptist churches', but they value links with others who are exploring ways to embody Anabaptist perspectives. During the first half of 2017 we have invited Andrew Francis to talk with these groups, exploring how this network might develop. If you are interested in contributing to this conversation, please contact Andrew at anmchara@sky.com

Meanwhile, Mike and Cheryl Nimz have encountered several groups searching for authentic ways of being church who are inspired by the Anabaptist vision. Might some of these form Anabaptist churches? And Urban Expression is a church planting agency with Anabaptist values at its heart. Does the Network need to review its approach and, perhaps in partnership with Urban Expression, intentionally plant Anabaptist churches? If you have views on this, or interest in exploring this further, we'd love to hear from you.

Is Religion Costing the Earth?

The main Network conference this year is an opportunity to reflect on pressing environmental issues that periodically rise up the global political agenda only to be knocked down by other apparently more urgent concerns. What, if anything, can Christians and members of other faith communities contribute to the search for sustainable ways of living on the earth? Or is religion part of the problem?

Is there a distinctively Anabaptist approach to these issues? One of our core convictions says that 'we are committed to finding ways of living simply, sharing generously, caring for creation and working for justice'. But what does this mean in practice? What can we learn from others who have engaged with these issues in much greater depth than we have? We have invited guests from a number of other organisations to inform us, challenge us and help us respond to these issues.

Details of this event in Coventry on Saturday 3 June are attached. Please join us if you can – and tell others about this.

Events

20-23 February

Bridge Builders' course: 'Leading with Emotional Maturity' in Hemel Hempstead

1-6 March

Christian Peacemaker Teams, European Convergence, Yorkshire

5-6 April

Anabaptist Theology Forum, in Bristol

23-28 April

Bridge Builders' course: 'Transforming Church Conflict' in Hemel Hempstead

24-27 April

Block week, Centre for Anabaptist Studies in Bristol

20-21 May

Crucible weekend, Birmingham

22-26 May

Block week, Centre for Anabaptist Studies in Bristol

3 June

Anabaptist Network day conference: 'Is Religion costing us the Earth?' Coventry

Networkers

The Anabaptist Network, in partnership with the Mennonite Trust, supports Alexandra Elish and Mike and Cheryl Nimz as development workers.

Alexandra Elish

Alexandra writes: 'Three months passes in a blink, yet the world seems like quite a different place since I last wrote for this newsletter. Political and social upheavals dominate the news and it seems like society is in a collective state of heightened anxiety.

'This past week I have been mulling over two pieces of writing: C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* (specifically the letters between Screwtape and Wormwood dealing with politics and democracy) and an article entitled *Alien Citizens* by William Willimon, reflecting on the challenge of living faithfully as Christians and the church in these times. Willimon, quoting Karl Barth and Eberhard Arnold, rehearses his call from *Resident Aliens* (co-authored with Stanley Hauerwas and now celebrating its 25th anniversary) for Christians to fully inhabit the political nature of being the church by continuing to assert that "Jesus is Lord".

'While quietism and political disengagement are the potential pitfalls of focussing primarily on the life and activity of the church, I was once again inspired by this vision of the church as an alternative community with particular (and peculiar) practices that point to the Kingdom of God realised here and now. "What kind of particular/peculiar practices might Jesus-following communities form their common life around?" is a question that I have been thinking through with Anabaptist friends over the past few months. We hope to have a discussion as part of the upcoming Anabaptist Theology Forum on this question and reflect on some of our conversations as younger Anabaptists.

'I reflected again on this when travelling to Lithuania to meet brothers and sisters who are part of the Anabaptist Mennonite family there. There are unique challenges for these Christian communities in former communist countries and they value our prayers as they witness to the Prince of Peace in their context. Over the past few months I have continued to develop

partnerships with other organisations with peace-centric values, such as CHIPs and CPT. These partnerships help to facilitate shared learning and create opportunities for greater collaboration on projects engaging with schools and communities around issues of peace and community flourishing.

'As we face the coming months and the political and ethical challenges that are to come, I am convinced that our Anabaptist values cannot be faithfully realised without being embodied in physical Christian communities, meeting to work out what it means to follow Jesus together. I believe that how we address this challenge is a key issue for the Anabaptist Network to reflect on in these times.'

Mike and Cheryl Nimz

Mike writes: 'We have been participating in many of the same events that we have in the past. There have been the church planting conferences, one in which had speakers, Tom Sine and Shane Claiborne. It was exciting to hear what they had to share just after the US election had taken place. Tom Sine had lunch with us and we shared some thoughts about what had happened. There have also been other events, like the Centre for Anabaptist Studies lecture. Dr Mary Raber was the lecturer and very engaging.

'The European gathering of Church and Peace was held in Birmingham again this year. It was very well attended and very well done. The schedule for the day included Simon Barrow of Ekklesia. There was a series of discussions, both formal and informal, about the need of the church to stand against the growing hatred and war stance spreading through the West.

'We are also participating in some weekly groups. One of these groups has decided to be much more active and activist. This group sees the need to support refugees and is in contact with a couple of groups that they hope to find a way of supporting. Another group they are looking to be a part of is Citizens UK. This is a social action group that supports people in many ways, trying to decrease discrimination in all forms and against all people.

'The groups that we attend weekly and others that we attend regularly in the Birmingham area are committed communities of faithful people. We do more than just regular meetings. We

often gather for weekend getaways. This allows us to spend more time with each other and to get to know each other on a much deeper level.

'We are being invited to speak at more churches – most of these are in the Birmingham area, but there are some in farther away places. We have spoken in Leeds a couple of times and hope to speak there more. We are hoping to engage with more people and churches in the near future. We are also trying to get Anabaptist groups going in London and Birmingham. We had one in Birmingham, in the past, but it was too heavily dependent on us and we were not able to commit the time and space, as we were so busy away from home.

'There are many more things happening here. Guests from all over the world are staying and some are here for the purpose of seeing what we are doing in order to try and do something similar in their own places. There are people who are coming through for other reasons, which helps us to connect to a much wider faith community in the UK.'

Cheryl writes: 'One of the core values of living out our faith in an Anabaptist perspective is living our lives out together as a community. What does this mean? This was discussed at one of the study groups that we were a part of a month or so ago. They all agreed that this was important but this group that had met together for years questioned how this could be done. I suggested perhaps we needed to be vulnerable and accountable with each other. I proceeded to tell them some experiences that we have had with this.

'We are a part of several groups in Birmingham. One of these groups is called Monday Night Peacemeal. We can have anywhere from 6 to 16 people show up. We have a sharing time during the evening where we share concerns and also great things that are happening. We trust each other. We support each other. We are vulnerable with each other. It took some time before we got to this place as we all have different backgrounds and personalities.

'So, when we got an email from one of our friends with "Help" in the subject line, we rallied around him, no questions asked. He allowed himself to be vulnerable and seek the help from his friends who had walked alongside him this past year.

'I've mentioned before about our church on Tuesday (we meet in our friends' home). We

have become very close and one of the reasons is because we are vulnerable and accountable with each other. When there was a relationship in turmoil, instead of taking sides or walking away, we stood and supported each other and walked with them in humility and love.

'When I shared some of these things with the study group, they said that this is so against our culture but they wanted to start working on this. They said that they grew up with the saying, "Put on a stiff upper lip and get on with it." It's hard when we are so conditioned to doing things on our own. We have such an individualistic and proud society that it looks like we are weak when we even ask for help.

'In this crazy, messed up, divisive world, I feel encouraged – encouraged that so many people understand that we can do this together and make communities that are so full of love, that it's contagious.'

News and Events

New address

The Anabaptist Network has a new address: it is PO Box 73540, London E9 9DB. Please use this for any correspondence from now on.

Charismatic Anabaptists?

Several people have expressed interest in an event that explores the charismatic dimensions of early Anabaptism and the significance of the Anabaptist tradition for those whose spirituality and church experience has been influenced by the charismatic movement. No date or venue has yet been fixed for this event, but we would welcome expressions of interest.

Network of Communities

Developing the Network

It is several years now since the Anabaptist network of communities was formed. During that time various groups have joined and we have held several ANC days in different locations. We feel the time is right to consult

members of this network and ask what the network means to them and how it might operate or develop over the coming years.

To this end we have invited **Andrew Francis**, who was the Anabaptist Network's first development worker, to be in touch with member groups, asking for an opportunity to visit them, listen to their experience and reflect with them on future possibilities. He will be doing this over the next few weeks and reporting to the steering group in May.

If you are interested in this conversation and would like to connect with Andrew, you can contact him at anmchara@sky.com

Study Groups

There is interest in developing new study groups in three locations. In the past we have contacted people on our database in those regions to ask who is interested, but we now often only have email addresses and no indication of where people live.

So, please get in touch if you live in one of these regions and might be interested in joining or helping to form a new group:

Birmingham: contact Mike & Cheryl Nimz: nimzcycles@gmail.com

Belfast: contact either Gordon McDade or Karen Sethuraman: gmcdade@btinternet.com or sethuraman.karen@gmail.com

London (probably East London): contact Alex Elish: alexandra.ellish@gmail.com

If you are interested in helping to form a study group in another region, please let us know.

Anabaptist Theology Forum

Linda Wilson writes: 'The next ATF will be held at Bristol Baptist College, on 5-6 April, 2017. The last one in Bristol was interesting and enjoyable – you are welcome to come if you can to all or some of the sessions.

'We have some interesting sessions planned. Aaron Kaufman, who is based in Germany and works with Christian Peacemaker Teams, will be giving a presentation on his recent time with a CP team on Lesbos, working with refugees

there and in particular discussing the injustices they are suffering on the island.

'Dan Yarnell and Andy Hardy will be presenting material from their forthcoming book in the After Christendom series, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom*, and Alexandra Elish, Martin Parkes and Peter Atkins will be leading a discussion around the development of Anabaptist "Common Practices".

'There will also be opportunities to catch up with each other, and an evening meal at Zizzi's. You will need to book in advance, for catering reasons. Final costs, and deadlines, are yet to be finalised, but you can register your interest by emailing linda.wilson@blueyonder.co.uk

'Unfortunately, we don't have much suitable accommodation in Bristol, so you may have to find your own: again, details will be confirmed soon. But I'm sure it will be a very stimulating couple of days!'

If you want to be added to the forum mailing list, please email atf@menno.org.uk

Article

Pilgram Marpeck – who?

The Centre for Anabaptist Studies is offering a study week on 24-27 April exploring the life and contemporary significance of Pilgram Marpeck.

Why spend time studying a dead Anabaptist? Is the history of the movement important? In 1991, the Anabaptist Network was formed in response to growing interest in Anabaptist perspectives and the conviction that these were helpful in our emerging post-Christendom context. Our focus has always been on following Jesus today. But we believe history is important – learning from our forebears, and making sure we don't make Anabaptism mean anything we want it to mean, disconnected from historical realities.

The Centre offers modules (study weeks, online courses and webinars) and other resources for those who want to ground their contemporary convictions in the history of the movement and learn from those who paid a heavy price as they championed these convictions and presented the first sustained challenge to the Christendom system.

Network of Organisations

Why Pilgram Marpeck? He was an influential first-generation church leader, who lived rather longer than many others, provided guidance for several congregations, interacted with other Anabaptists and representatives of other traditions, and wrote extensively. Many of his writings are extant, giving us plenty of material to draw from in assessing his contribution to the Anabaptist tradition. He was respected by most of his contemporaries, and in recent years he has been perceived as an attractive alternative to more extreme figures within the Anabaptist movement.

However, because the congregations with which he was associated did not survive beyond the sixteenth-century, no Marpeckian tradition persisted alongside those associated with the Swiss Brethren, the Mennonites or the Hutterites. Pilgram Marpeck simply disappeared from history until his rediscovery during the twentieth century. His writings were lost until they were uncovered in various European libraries and archives. Might this indicate that his brand of Anabaptism was not robust enough? In times of opposition and persecution, is an extreme form of religion more durable?

Marpeck was not a typical Anabaptist leader. Although he faced uncertainty and danger, he did not suffer at the hands of the authorities as so many others did. This was in part because of choices he made about where to live and when to move on; but it was also due in no small measure to his professional qualifications, valuable skills and ability to mix with those who had power and influence. Is this evidence of compromise and cowardice, or does he offer an unusual glimpse of how a moderate form of Anabaptism was tolerated, if not welcomed, in some contexts?

These are the kinds of questions we will explore in this study week – it's not history for its own sake but history as a source of learning how we might follow Jesus more faithfully today. Might you be interested in joining us?

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:
www.facebook.com/groups/anabaptiststudies
<http://anabaptiststudies.wordpress.com>

Christian Peacemaker Teams

'In Harm's Way: stories from the world's frontline of peace-making'



Speaker: Sarah Thompson,
CPT Executive Director
Date: 2 March 2017 at 7pm
Venue: All Hallows Church,
24 Regent Terrace, Leeds
LS6 1NP

Sarah will be sharing stories and insights from 30 years of CPT history, and talking about Christian peace work today.



Contact: CPT outreach worker, Ruth, on 07794 659503 or email uk@cpt.org

Mennonite Trust

'In the previous newsletter we mentioned ways in which the trustees are using our resources to support the wider Anabaptist movement. We also support the work of Urban Expression and are in the process of buying a third house for the use of team members. This enables them to live where they are working in at reduced rents.

'The Trust is still looking for a new trustee with financial expertise – such people are clearly in high demand by charitable trusts and hard to find. Any suggestions very welcome!'

Urban Expression



'Although Urban Expression describes itself as a church planting agency, our approach is flexible and does not usually result in traditional forms of church emerging. The context in which they find themselves and the vision of the local team determine the outcomes.

'Three teams have completed their assignments with Urban Expression during the past year, so here are examples of the outcomes.

'A team in Stoke has initiated a very effective local radio ministry and continues to develop this.

'One of our Bristol teams has launched "Holy Spokes", a bike maintenance project that is a very impressive social enterprise.

'Another of our Bristol teams has evolved into a Christian community based in a converted vicarage on a large housing estate.

'All three developments are encouraging in that Urban Expression has facilitated them and helped them to reach the point at which they are viable without our ongoing support. None have planted what might be regarded as a traditional church, but all three are involved in evangelistic and social ministry among those who would not normally be found in church.

'We continue to find that we need to embrace innovative approaches if we are to reach those who are far from the churches.'

For further information about opportunities, or to request newsletters or offer support, go to the website www.urbanexpression.org.uk or email enquiries@urbanexpression.org.uk

Bridge Builders



Tribute to Chris Burch

We were saddened to hear of the unexpected death of Chris Burch, chair of Bridge Builders in December. **Andrew Francis** shares this tribute:

'Many of us in the Network were shocked to hear of the sudden death of Chris Burch, who has been a friend to many and involved in the Network for over 30 years. He was only 66.

'Some of us first got to know Chris as a dedicated inner-city parish priest in Sheffield. As the city's URC's Urban Priority Area Minister while co-chairing "Faith in Leeds", I first worked

ecumenically alongside Chris in Leeds, where he and his wife Roz's hospitality at their Osmondthorpe vicarage for many meetings helped create several prophetic initiatives.

'Chris became a Canon and Precentor at Coventry Cathedral, where his Anabaptist involvements told of his radical theology. He found, and gave, much support and challenge in his involvement in the Anabaptist Theology Forum. Before returning to UPA parish ministry in Leicester, he wrote for *Anabaptism Today* about being an Anabaptist in the Establishment.

'Chris shared our many values about conflict mediation, becoming heavily involved in Bridge Builders. While executive vice-Chair of the Mennonite Trust, I worked with Chris, as Bridge Builders' transition Chair, helping them evolve into a separate trust and organisation.

'In our meetings at conferences, Chris' CAMRA membership always aided our escape for a good pint and conversation. Chris was a great model railway builder, creating layouts which still tour the exhibitions. He was an expert on English choral music, and a great bass, easily finding his place in the CD-recording '8ctave' clergy singers.

'He was a man of many parts, faithful in prayer, a family man, a good pastor and wise friend. Our thoughts and prayers are with Roz and the rest of Chris' family. Upon hearing of Chris' death, Alan Kreider quoted Revelation 14:13: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; they rest from their labours and their good works go after them"'.
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Crucible



The eleventh year of the *Crucible* course – a course for pioneers and anyone interested in mission on the margins in post-Christendom – continues in Birmingham. The third weekend takes place on 20-21 May.

At the November weekend we introduced an additional module, run by our partners, CURBS (children in urban situations). We plan to run this again in November 2017.

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

An intentional, dispersed Anabaptist community?

In the previous newsletter we asked a question. Would you be interested in a dispersed, intentional community of people who are trying to live out the Anabaptist core convictions? A small group of people from across the network is continuing to explore this and has started to consider what this might look like. Here again is a summary of their initial proposals:

Joining such a community would involve making a number of commitments, which could include:

- 1) Attending an annual gathering.
- 2) Regular and committed use of *Take Our Moments and Our Days* (an Anabaptist prayer book) and using this resource at gatherings.
- 3) Actively participating in peace and justice groups – such as a local foodbank, joining an Amnesty group, or something similar.
- 4) Giving financially to the community, possibly to create a fund that could be used to further peace and justice causes, or to resource community members and/or their projects.

There is also an ongoing conversation about developing some common Anabaptist practices that might help support those who want to live out Anabaptist convictions. If you would like to help develop this idea, or would just like to keep in touch as it progresses, email **Ros Parkes** at parkes.ros@gmail.com

Books and Resources

‘After Christendom’ series

As the series moves to a new publisher (Wipf & Stock), we have obtained copies of most books published by Paternoster at reduced prices. We can offer these books to you at these prices if you are interested in obtaining any of them. The list is below. Please let us know of any interest and we can supply the prices.

Church after Christendom
Faith and Politics after Christendom
Youth Work after Christendom
Worship and Mission after Christendom
Reading the Bible after Christendom

Hospitality and Community after Christendom
Women and Men after Christendom
Atheism after Christendom
God after Christendom?
Relationships and Emotions after Christendom

The first book in the series, Stuart Murray’s *Post-Christendom*, is currently being revised and updated for publication by Wipf & Stock. It should be out in 2018. Copies of the first edition can be supplied for postage costs only!

Book Notes

You might be interested in the following books that have recently appeared or will soon:

Gordon Zerbe: *Philippians* (Herald): volume 31 in the Believers Church Bible Commentary series.

Palmer Becker: *Anabaptist Essentials: ten signs of a unique Christian faith* (Herald): convictions and practices of the Amish, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ.

Ched Myers: *Watershed Discipleship* (Wipf & Stock): a critical, contextual, and constructive approach to ecological theology and practice, highly recommended by Noel Moules.

Upside-Down Living: a new Bible study series from Herald Press. The first two volumes are out in February: Anita Amstutz on ‘Sabbath’ and Becca Lachman on ‘Technology’.

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 using the address or email address below. And if you have information or news items you would like included in the next newsletter, please let us have these no later than **31 May 2017**.

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Website: www.anabaptistnetwork.com email: admin@anabaptistnetwork.com