



Anabaptist Network News

A Year of Celebrations

We mentioned in the previous newsletter that the Anabaptist Network is twenty years old in 2012. We are also celebrating this year the fifteenth anniversary of **Urban Expression** and the thirtieth anniversary of **Workshop**, two of our main partner organisations.

Workshop 30 on 6 October will also include the launch of Noel Moules' book *Fingerprints of Fire...Footsteps of Peace*.

Diverse-City on 17-18 November will celebrate fifteen years of inner-city church planting and the 100th team member recruited by Urban Expression.

Both organisations would be glad to welcome any readers of this newsletter to these events (you can contact us at the address below for further details).

In the February newsletter we also identified some of our **priorities** for the next few years:

- Reaching and inspiring the next generation.
- Introducing the Anabaptist vision into church contexts where it is not well known but could be very helpful.
- Engaging with people on the edge of or beyond the Christian community with whom Anabaptist values seem to resonate.

We welcome suggestions as to how we can make progress toward these goals.

And we want to invite you to celebrate our twentieth anniversary by deciding to offer **regular financial support** to the Network. As you know, we do not ask for a membership fee or any donation towards these newsletters. Our conferences and other activities roughly break even. We have no staff to pay or premises to maintain, so our overheads are minimal. Nor are we in financial need at present – our limited resources are adequate to sustain the current level of activities.

But we would like to do more, especially in pursuit of the objectives we outlined above, because we believe the Anabaptist vision is potent and relevant to post-Christendom society and to churches adjusting to this emerging context.

If you share this conviction, will you help us to break new ground and engage with many more people? With this newsletter you will find information to enable you to respond to this invitation.

As for this and future newsletters, we will continue to feature news of resources and events alongside short articles and reports from members of the networks of communities and organisations. But we also plan to include short articles from readers reflecting on the **practical impact of the Anabaptist vision** on our lives, families, churches, work practices, neighbourhoods and community activism. Earthing the Anabaptist vision is another priority as we move into the next decade. **Ros Parkes'** article is the first in this new series – we welcome your contribution to future newsletters!

Events

15 September

Disorganised Religion
– Reading the Bible
after Christendom,
Portsmouth

25 September

Celebrating Dissent,
Bristol

6 October

Workshop 30 event,
London

13 October

Disorganised Religion
– Reading the Bible
after Christendom,
Manchester

16 October

Celebrating Dissent,
Bristol

3 November

Disorganised Religion
– Reading the Bible
after Christendom,
London

6 November

Celebrating Dissent,
Bristol

10-11 November

Crucible course: first
weekend, Birmingham

17-18 November

Diverse-City: Urban
Expression weekend
to celebrate 15 years,
London

5-6 December

Theology forum,
Offchurch

What practical difference does Anabaptism make to your life?

Anabaptist thinking has had a significant impact on my understanding of the role of Christians in peace-making.

In the summer of 2003 I was at Soul Survivor; earlier that year the UK began its campaign in Iraq. One of the seminars was on the Just War theory and I went along as I had questions about the war. As far as I can remember, this was the first time I had heard a Christian talk on anything to do with war. War, violence and how followers of Jesus might respond wasn't talked about in my church (although our armed forces did get prayed for most Sundays).

Following the seminar, while I didn't think the war in Iraq met the criteria for a Just War, the theory in itself seemed a sensible and practical way of responding to the threat of violence.

A couple of years later I met Anabaptists, first through Workshop, then through the book *Post-Christendom* by Stuart Murray. I got to know a Mennonite couple from the United States, and one of them decided to go to Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). I didn't understand why – I thought he was completely mad – why would he put himself in harm's way? I continued to read about Anabaptism and started going to the Bristol study group.

Around the same time I got a job as a youth and schools manager for the British Red Cross. Part of the role involved teaching young people about International Humanitarian Law (IHL) – rules that govern how war should be conducted – so that they could think about humanitarian values (e.g., how to treat civilians, how to treat the wounded).

Initially I didn't have a problem, but as I ran the sessions I became frustrated that, due to the Red Cross' neutrality, I couldn't challenge the concept of war. All I could do was discuss what the limits to war should be. It was thought that by discussing alternatives to war, one might imply blame, or be seen as judging, one or both sides, undermining the Red Cross' neutrality.

I didn't want to do anything that might call the neutrality and impartiality of the Red Cross into question, but I was left with the feeling that I wasn't being true to myself and what I believed.

How we taught IHL also became problematic to

me. In order to engage the pupils we used role-play scenarios. The students loved the sessions and thought that they were really fun, so much so that I heard one young person say, 'That was great. I want to join the army now!' That cut straight through me. I was upset to realise that the sessions made the thought of war fun. It made me question what we were doing and how we were doing it.

So after much agonising I handed in my notice. I couldn't be neutral on the subject of war and violence and I couldn't continue to teach IHL in a way that made people think war was fun and exciting. I was able to share the reason for my resignation with the senior management team.

Two years later I joined a CPT delegation to Colombia to see what active peace-making and nonviolent resistance looked like in practice.

Encountering Anabaptist values of peace and nonviolence has totally changed the way I think. I am a long way from considering that Just War theory is a decent basis from which a Christian might respond to violence!

Anabaptism has had a significant impact on some decisions that I have made. I continue to explore peace-making and together with my husband have a dream of helping young people in churches think through some of this. For now I am exploring with CPT what I can do to further support their work from the UK.

Ros Parkes

99% Pacifist?

A Mennonite pastor, at an event for Christian leaders in America interested in engaging with the Anabaptist tradition, reports that a high-profile preacher assured him that he was '99% pacifist'. Then – opening the lapel of his suit to reveal a holster hidden within – he said, 'I also have a license to carry a concealed weapon... and I bet half of the other preachers here in the audience are carrying handguns as well.'

The Mennonite pastor laughed and asked what it would look like if he was only 90% pacifist!

Before we are tempted to say 'only in America', in what ways do we British Christians pick and choose which parts of the Anabaptist vision to engage with or, more importantly, which aspects of the teachings of Jesus to take seriously?

News and Events

Events

In partnership with the Mennonite Centre Trust (MCT) and others, we are continuing to run events in various locations (some events more than once in different places), in three streams:

- **'The Naked Anabaptist'** – introducing the Anabaptist story and vision.
- **'Disorganised Religion'** – exploring 'after Christendom' themes
- **'Don't mention the @&#% Word'** – debating controversial topics

However, in common with other organisations, it is proving difficult to attract sufficient numbers to these events – maybe people are reluctant to spend money on such activities in a recession? Three day conferences have been cancelled, including 'Prophetic Voices' events which have been very popular elsewhere.

Coming up during the autumn are three further opportunities to hear **Lloyd Pietersen** speaking on *Reading the Bible after Christendom* – in Portsmouth (15 September), Manchester (13 October) and London (3 November). These are in the 'Disorganised Religion' series.

There are also three evenings (25 September, 16 October and 6 November) in Bristol in which we are partnering with the Baptists to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of the first Baptist church in England. Entitled *Celebrating Dissent*, these will explore the radical reformers, radical Baptists and radical Bristolians. **Rachael Fletcher, Stuart Murray Williams** and **Ruth Gouldbourne** are the main speakers.

At the Greenbelt Festival (24-27 August) there will be three seminars involving members of the Network. **Andrew Francis** is speaking on food and hospitality, **Dave Nussbaum** is speaking in his role with WWF, and **Karen Stallard** and **Stuart Murray Williams** are leading a seminar on 'The Naked Anabaptist'.

Further ahead is an event **Juliet Kilpin**, MCT development worker, is organising together with Greenbelt and others. *ADVENTurous*, a one-day winter festival earthed in the dual themes of ADVENT and ADVENTURE, will seek to inspire guests through the spoken word and artistry to embrace a brave and adventurous approach to

life, especially in the areas of economy, ecology and faith. Guests will include **Mike Frost** and other boundary-pushing collaborators. This will be at Union Chapel, London on 1 December.

There is more information on these events, and others, on our website. You can book for many of the events at www.avastminority.com.

And Juliet is keen to hear from you if you would like her help to organise any events in your area (including repeats of events held elsewhere). Contact her at julietkilpin@aol.com.

Anabaptism in Scotland

Ian Milligan, Simon Barrow, Carla Roth and others are working to develop, encourage and grow the small networks of people interested in Anabaptism in Scotland. A small series of 'café conversations' are planned in Edinburgh, along with a discussion of 'Disorganised Religion' at the Festival of Spirituality and Peace in August. Ian and Simon will also be meeting with US Mennonite 'Celtic Pilgrims' in Scotland at the end of June. Updates will feature on a new blog: <http://anabaptismscotland.blogspot.co.uk/>. Contacts: Ian Milligan ianmilligan10@gmail.com or Simon Barrow simon.barrow@ekkleisia.co.uk.

Other News

Discussions continue with Mennonite Church Canada Witness, which plans to send a couple to work alongside the Network over the next few years, possibly as soon as this autumn. We are hoping to have an internet conversation with an interested couple during June. Then we'll need to explore the visa implications...

Just over two years ago, two congregations in Burgos, Spain, merged to form *Comunidades Anabautistas Unidas* (United Anabaptist Communities). Dennis and Connie Byler, guests at our network of communities' conference in 2010, are leaders in the church. Earlier this year they opened a new centre, the first freestanding Protestant church building in the city.

The *Radix Community* (Anabaptists and Jesus-centric Quakers) have launched their website: www.radixcommunity.org.uk – there is a weekly blog and they are about to launch their monthly reviews section. They were actively supportive of *Occupy 2011* and are currently looking for a new 'community house' in the Pennines.

Network of Communities

ANC Gathering: Manchester

Sue Haslehurst writes: We're delighted that the Anabaptist Network study group in Manchester has offered to host the next national gathering of the Anabaptist network of communities. This will take place on Saturday 9 February 2013 at Didsbury Baptist Church, Manchester. (We couldn't easily find a suitable date in the autumn of 2012 so have drifted into the following year.) We hope it will be a great opportunity for many of us to get together for a day of talking, eating, thinking, worshipping and having fun together. There will be a welcome for all ages.

We hope to explore some aspects of following Jesus in all of life, not least by drawing on the experiences and practices of some Manchester group members and others. For any who are not part of the network of communities but are drawn to Anabaptism, we hope the day will be particularly informative by giving a flavour of who contemporary Anabaptists are and what they care about. It will be a 'market place' day with a varied programme for all to share.

Grace Churches, Birmingham

Tom Barlow and **Malcolm Stevens** have been involved in the network of communities since it began. They are leaders in two Grace churches in Birmingham.



We invited them to introduce their churches and the tradition from which they come.

What kind of community are you and where are you based?

We are two independent evangelical churches in two neighbourhoods of Birmingham. Grace Church Shirley has existed since about 1989 and is now under local leadership. Frankley Grace Community Church started nine years ago and is led by a multi-cultural leadership team of North Americans and British.

How and why did you begin?

Both churches were 'planted' by American missionaries from the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC USA). Our 'branch' of the Brethren tree traces its roots back to 1708 in Schwarzenau, Germany. A team of about 25 Grace Brethren missionaries works alongside Europeans in several countries – including Portugal, Spain, Ireland, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom.

What are your main values, activities and priorities?

Historically, those who founded our group tried to keep together elements from Pietism – focusing on personal spiritual experience with God – and the Anabaptist commitment to the Bible as the inerrant, authoritative Word of God (many of our values are in line with values of the FIEC). Today, this is manifested in a solid commitment to the Bible, a strong emphasis on reaching out into the community, and disciple making. Practical love towards one other is a hallmark of our fellowship.

Our main contacts with the community are via clubs, which we either run or heavily support. Examples include: guitar clubs, speakers' club, film club, English conversational classes and the Goldwing Club (for bikers).

As churches, we hold a number of events which attract good numbers from the community, e.g. Fish and Chips quiz night, barn dance, treasure hunt, Christmas Eve and gospel services.

In what ways do you draw on the Anabaptist tradition?

The primary place given to the Word of God (rather than human or church tradition) is the biggest element from the Anabaptist tradition as we understand it. There is also a strong belief in the priesthood of each believer, simple spiritual 'households', discipleship at the heart of all we do, and shared leadership.

What are your hopes for the Anabaptist Network of Communities?

As smaller spiritual communities without a great deal of support structure or broader fellowship, contact with likeminded brothers and sisters in Christ could be quite helpful. Unfortunately, many in our churches are not entirely aware of their spiritual heritage and do not always see

the value of broader fellowship, so it can be difficult to motivate them to invest time and energy, which is already quite limited, in wider networking.

We profit from the resources which the Network produces from an Anabaptist perspective – and hope that can continue, especially as western societal trends become increasingly difficult to navigate.

Anabaptist Theology Forum

The theology forum met again at Offa House in May. Topics included the significance and function of memory and its loss, the way Bridge Builders tackles conflict transformation, and religions as ‘vestigial states’. The next gathering will be the usual 27 hours from 2-3 December 2012. The cost is pro rata to £70 for the whole event. The forum is intended for both practical theological reflectors and reflective church practitioners. Among highlights next time will be Ruth Gouldbourne on Balthasar Hubmaier’s Communion Service, and further discussion of where we are and where we’re going with the post-Christendom analysis. For information, contact: simon.barrow@ekkleisia.co.uk.

Network of Organisations

ANO Gathering: London

Representatives from the Anabaptist network of organisations met in North London in May for the first ANO gathering, hosted by **Juliet Kilpin** and **Noel Moules**. They were joined by guests from other organisations with similar values.

There was enthusiasm for a second gathering in 2013, probably in Birmingham, and there may be a further opportunity this autumn to meet up with others who were invited but could not make the May date. The Anabaptist vision appears to be attractive to a more diverse network than we had realised.

Urban Expression: Anabaptist Church Planting?

Urban Expression has been hailed by several people as an Anabaptist approach to church

planting. Some have reached this conclusion as they have learned about its ethos, expectations, values and methods. Others have been aware of connections between the Anabaptist Network and Urban Expression and the overlap of some personnel. By no means is everyone involved in Urban Expression signed up to an Anabaptist approach to faith and discipleship, though some of the trustees, steering group members and team members are. But there are aspects of Urban Expression’s practice that reflect values and perspectives associated with Anabaptism.

Some of the Urban Expression core values are recognisably Anabaptist:

We believe that the gospel works through relationships and that serving God consists largely in building life-giving relationships with others. The Anabaptist tradition is very strongly focused on relationships, hospitality and community.

We recognise that Christian faith is a journey and we are committed to helping people move forward, wherever they are at present. The Anabaptist tradition emphasises the progressive nature of discipleship, with ‘following after’ Jesus being a core principle.

We focus on under-churched areas and neglected people, trying to find ways of communicating Jesus appropriately to those most frequently marginalised, condemned and abused by society. Anabaptism was largely a movement of the poor and has continued to be empathetic towards the poor and those on the margins.

We see teamwork, networking and mutual accountability as vital, recognising that individuals and churches need each other. Mutual accountability has been one of the core principles of Anabaptist ecclesiology, based on the baptismal commitment and worked out in various forms of admonition and learning together.

We recognise the importance of taking risks and the demands of mission in the inner city, and we believe that it is acceptable to fail. Being an Anabaptist was risky and often resulted in suffering, inculcating an approach to faith that did not treat failure or opposition as surprising.

We believe in discouraging dependency and developing indigenous leadership within maturing churches that will have the capacity to sustain and reproduce themselves. The practice

of many Anabaptist communities has been to recognise leaders from their own congregations rather than relying on external accreditation.

We acknowledge our dependence on God and affirm our continual need of prayer and God's empowering Spirit. Having little institutional, political or economic power, early Anabaptists emphasised strongly reliance on the grace and power of God, mediated by the Holy Spirit.

We want to learn from others, seeking to shape what we do in light of the experiences, discoveries, successes and mistakes of fellow-workers. Anabaptist teachers regularly invited those who heard them to offer other insights and correct them – this was very unusual in the sixteenth century and remains distinctive today.

We realise the importance of living uncluttered lives, holding possessions lightly and recognising that all we have is to be at God's disposal. Anabaptists were condemned by others for their attitude towards possessions, as they insisted these should be available to others in need, and Anabaptists have generally emphasised simple lifestyles.

And some of the commitments are recognisably Anabaptist:

We are committed to following God on the margins and in the gaps, expecting to discover God at work among powerless people and in places of weakness. Anabaptism was located primarily among the poor and powerless, and there was a conviction that this location enabled them to understand Scripture more accurately than their well-fed, powerful contemporaries.

We are committed to being Jesus-centred in our view of the Bible, our understanding of mission and all aspects of discipleship. Christocentrism in all aspects of theology, biblical interpretation and understandings of discipleship is a central Anabaptist principle.

We are committed to a vision of justice, peace and human flourishing for the city and all its inhabitants. Anabaptism is one of the historic 'peace church' traditions, committed to a holistic understanding of mission and to peaceful approaches to human flourishing.

We are committed to uncluttered church, focused on mission, rooted in local culture and equipping all to develop and use their God-given gifts. Anabaptists pioneered a simpler form of church than their contemporaries and

insisted that all members of their congregations should use their spiritual gifts.

We are committed to unconditional service, holistic ministry, bold proclamation, prioritising the poor and being a voice for the voiceless. Anabaptists have empathised with the poor and the powerless and have refused to interpret mission as evangelism only (though at times they have not been so strong on proclamation).

We are committed to respecting and building relationship with other faith communities and are averse to all forms of manipulation or erosion of liberty. Although early Anabaptists had little contact with other faiths, they rejected the call to go to war against the Turks if they should invade. They were pioneers of religious liberty and non-coercion in matters of faith.

Not surprisingly, then, Stuart Murray's *The Naked Anabaptist* (Paternoster, 2010) mentions Urban Expression in various places, giving examples of activities teams have been involved in which seem to relate to Anabaptist values. And there's a quotation from a former team leader in the book acknowledging the impact of the Anabaptist tradition on her. The E1 Community Church, planted by an Urban Expression team, has joined the Anabaptist network of communities, and Urban Expression belongs to the network of organisations.

For further information about Urban Expression, visit www.urbanexpression.org.uk.

Ekklesia

The Anabaptist-shaped religion and society think tank has recently published 'Alternative perspectives on the Jubilee'. It has collaborated with the Children's Society and other charities in making the case for free school meals, made submissions to the Westminster and Scottish Governments on Scotland's constitutional future, marked the passing of theologian of nonviolence Walter Wink, offered ongoing Middle East analysis, and co-sponsored with the University of Stirling 'Critical Religion' research group a visit from Canada by feminist religion scholar Professor Naomi Goldenberg.

There is also collaboration with Church Urban Fund on community transformation and with disability groups on welfare reform concerns. Ekklesia supported a meeting on 'just peace' in Israel–Palestine at the Church of Scotland's

General Assembly, discussed God and morality at the International Science Festival and in July will contribute to an Accord Coalition meeting on inclusive schooling at the C of E General Synod. More information: www.ekkleisia.co.uk

Mennonite Centre Trust

(formerly the London Mennonite Centre)

Andrew Francis writes: Many exciting changes are underway for the Mennonite Centre. We are relocating to Selly Oak in Birmingham, in order to work more actively with other Anabaptist-oriented partners. Property has been purchased and plans for its conversion are underway. Most of the staff will be based there, and are already relocating there, but Will Newcomb will lead the new administrative base in London (PO Box 68073, N22 9HS). The Trust hope to announce the appointment of a new Director in late June, so please make sure you have registered to receive the MCT Friends Newsletter via the website details on www.menno.org.uk.

Bridge Builders

Bridge Builders is recruiting a new voluntary worker as the next Bridge Builders Assistant to succeed Sam Moyer, who returns to the USA in June 2012. The position runs from September 2012 to July 2013. Board and accommodation are provided, along with a living allowance from a local trust. The position would suit a recent graduate who can share our vision for peace-making and who is looking to develop work experience, especially if they are interested in testing a call to Christian ministry. For further information please contact Alastair McKay at alastair@bbministries.org.uk or 020 8883 3033. Applications close on Monday 25 June 2012.

Bridge Builders continues to offer a programme of training courses for church leaders, including the acclaimed five-day foundation course, *Transforming Church Conflict*, running from 23 to 28 September 2012, and then again in 2013. See our website, www.bbministries.org.uk, for further details.

Speak

According to their latest update, SPEAK are saddling up for a busy summer! They write: We're preparing the ground for an awesome

Vocal Training in September, campaigning for climate justice at the Rio Earth Summit and getting on our bikes to launch the SPEAKathon Bardic Bike tour. And we're popping up all over the summer festivals. So don your helmet and your favourite bike clips, and ride with us as we share God's love of justice with everyone we encounter...

Workshop

Noel Moules writes: Preparations for a special day of celebrating thirty years of Workshop are well under way. 'Workshop 30' will take place at Union Chapel, Islington, London on 6 October. From noon there will be events and celebration, followed by an evening of music. My new book, *Fingerprints of Fire...Footprints of Peace*, will have its launch as part of the day. Please put this into your diary, plan to be there! For details and to book, go to www.workshop.org.uk.

Urban Expression

There has been a small but steady stream of applications to join or form teams recently. We are pleased to report the beginnings of a third team in Bristol and a new team in East London. Conversations are also underway about further teams in Birmingham and Manchester and new teams in cities where we are not currently working: we will have more news on this soon.

In June we are holding our first 'global summit' – a pretentious name for a conversation with representatives of UE movements in Sweden, The Netherlands, North America and the UK.

We are facing some financial pressures due to the withdrawal of a major regular grant from the Baptist Union (which is in financial difficulties). If anyone is interested in supporting a pioneering mission agency with Anabaptist values, please let us know...

For more information on our activities, please go to www.urbanexpression.org.uk.

Crucible

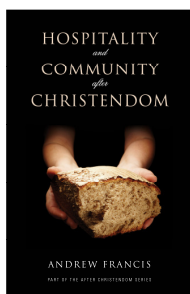
The eighth year of the *Crucible* course begins in November. It runs at the International Mission Centre in Selly Oak, Birmingham, with which the Mennonite Centre is forging a partnership,

so Anabaptist influence there and in the course is increasing. And the course is rooted in the same post-Christendom perspective as the 'After Christendom' series, exploring what it means to follow Jesus on the margins.

Why not come along and see what goes on? It is possible to come for just one weekend before deciding whether to do the whole course. More information at www.cruciblecourse.org.uk.

Books and Resources

After Christendom series



We are looking forward to the publication in August of the seventh book in the series: ***Hospitality and Community after Christendom*** by Andrew Francis. This will be available from the usual sources or can be ordered from the address below.

And we are glad to report the publication in North America of ***Reading the Bible after Christendom***. Three further books are under contract and being written, and there are other proposals imminent. We continue to receive very encouraging feedback from those who are reading the series.

The Naked Anabaptist

The book continues to sell well and translations into other languages are emerging. The Korean version is now out and the Swedish version is imminent. The '2 for 1' offer on ***The Naked Anabaptist*** is still available: buy a copy for yourself and one to give away to someone who might find it helpful.

Book Notes

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

Simon Goncharenko: *Wounds that Heal* (Pickwick Publications, 2011): a study of church discipline in the writings of Balthasar Hubmaier and its contemporary significance.

Michael Long: *Christian Peace and Non-violence* (Orbis Books, 2011): an extensive collection of evidence of Christian pacifism and non-violence from the first to the twenty-first century.

Jared Burkholder and David Cramer (eds): *The Activist Impulse* (Pickwick Publications, 2012): essays on the intersection of Evangelicals and Anabaptism.

Gerald Mast: *Go to Church, Change the World* (Herald Press, 2012): the transforming potential of regular activities of the Christian community.

Alfred Neufeld: *What We Believe Together* (Good Books, 2012): exploring the convictions of Anabaptist-related churches.

I P Asheervadam, Adhi Dharma and Alle Hoekema: *Churches Engage Asian Traditions* (Good Books, 2012): a volume in the Global Mennonite History series.

Donald Kraybill, Steven Nolt and David Weaver-Zercher: *The Amish Way: Patient Faith in a Perilous World* (Jossey-Bass, 2012): a study of the spirituality of Amish communities.

Paul Martens: *The Heterodox Yoder* (Cascade Books, 2012): a critical study of John Howard Yoder's writings that explores his theology and ethics and questions his Christian orthodoxy.

Stuart and Sian Murray Williams: *Multi-Voiced Church* (Paternoster, 2012): advocating ways of learning, worshipping, community building and decision-making that are multi-voiced.

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 **21 October 2012**.

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