

Anabaptist Network Newsletter

October 2003

Anabaptists together

In early July, six Anabaptist-oriented groups met together for an afternoon to affirm our shared vision and explore ways of working more closely together:

- The Anabaptist Network
- London Mennonite Centre
- Urban Expression
- Workshop
- Ekklesia
- Wood Green Mennonite Church

All these groups are represented on the Network's steering group and there are already many ways in which we work together (four of us shared a stand at Greenbelt in August, for example). What's more, we're friends! But what else might we do more effectively in partnership than on our own?

Between us we offer training and resources for Christian discipleship and church leadership, engagement with political issues, expertise on urban church planting, hospitality and library provision, a book service and six websites, study groups and conferences, mediation training and intersecting networks of over 5000 people.

How can we more effectively serve our existing constituencies? How can we offer distinctive Anabaptist perspectives to others who, like us, are grappling with the challenges of discipleship, mission and church life in a post-Christendom society? There was a lot of energy and plenty of creative thinking when we met in July. We will meet again in November to continue the conversation. But in the meantime...

Help wanted: do you have any suggestions? If you know more than one of these groups, what do you think a growing partnership might achieve? Are there other groups we ought to invite into this conversation (we've already discovered at least one more)?

Resource houses

Plans are moving forward to establish about 20 Anabaptist Network resource houses in different parts of the UK. The plan is to have resource houses in places beyond reach of the local study groups, so that Network resources are available more widely. Hosts will store the resources and

welcome visitors to borrow and return what they are interested in.

We are in the process of gathering the resources – books, booklets, journals, videos etc. We are collecting sets of past issues of *Anabaptism Today* and other material already in the UK. We have also been promised resources from the US and are awaiting a shipping consignment.

Help wanted: can you help us with this major project by donating Anabaptist books that are sitting on your shelves? Are you willing to offer your own home as a resource house? Or could you help finance this project with a one-off donation?

Anabaptist local churches?

Apart from the Wood Green Mennonite Church in London, there is no explicitly Anabaptist local church in the UK – though many are influenced by Anabaptist values and ways of operating. But this may be changing. Two church plants – one in London and one in Birmingham – are exploring what it might mean to be Anabaptist churches. So watch this space. Do you know of others?

During the 1990s the Network held two conferences specifically for local church leaders interested in the implications of the Anabaptist vision for their congregations. These were well-attended events and many found them useful. We're wondering about arranging another such conference. Please let us know if you would be interested in this?

Anabaptists in Yorkshire

The Anabaptist study group in Yorkshire held its first conference in September, in partnership with the Yorkshire Baptist Association. 'Exodus' was hosted by Ward Green Church, Barnsley, as about 35 participants examined why people are leaving churches and how we might respond. Jonathan Blakeborough reports:

“Stuart Murray Williams explored the reasons people leave church and outlined the kinds of churches that might encourage people to stay. John Mason of LEAD Consultants UK looked at the often very personal (or inter-personal) reasons why people leave their churches. In the afternoon participants (from Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, New and URC churches) were offered a selection

of topic groups: ‘The Anabaptist Tradition and the Journey Motif’ (David Warrington), ‘Emerging Church’ (led by Stuart), ‘Facing Conflict and Broken Relationships inside the Church’ (Alastair McKay), and ‘Room to Grow? – Spiritual growth and its influence on why people decide to leave their church’ (led by myself). My thanks to our speakers, facilitators and hosts.”

A question: should we run this conference again somewhere else? It was addressing topics of vital interest to Christians today. Would your church be interested in hosting this?

NB: The Yorkshire Anabaptist study group has recently divided and now meets in two locations – Leeds/Bradford and York/Hull.

Research assistant

Jared Diener completed his term of service as research assistant with the Network and returned to the US in August – only to return in October for three further months to work on the London Mennonite Centre’s library. He has made an excellent contribution and we are now looking forward to welcoming his successor – **Tim Nafziger** – who will be arriving in January. Tim brings some very useful skills and experience with him, including journalism and website expertise.

Help wanted: we are hoping to provide Tim with a laptop computer dedicated to his work for the Network. If you are planning to upgrade your laptop and could donate or sell your old one for this purpose, please let us know.

Anabaptists and politics

Some people think Anabaptism and politics do not mix, but many in the Anabaptist Network do not agree as a new book and a conference in 2004 will demonstrate.

Anabaptists and Politics conference

On Saturday 20 March 2004 we are organising a conference in Northampton to explore Anabaptist approaches to politics. The enclosed leaflet gives more details. If you plan to come, please register early, as we expect this to be a popular event.

Look out also for a new book by a member of the Network. *The Subversive Manifesto* by Jonathan Bartley was published recently by the Bible Reading Fellowship. Here’s a brief introduction (a full review will appear in *Anabaptism Today*):

“God has a political agenda – and it’s a subversive one. This is the message of a new book from the Anabaptist think-tank Ekklesia. *The Subversive Manifesto* is a call to Christians to rediscover the political dimension of their faith, a challenge that Christianity should be more about subverting the social order than defending it. Subtitled ‘lifting the lid on God’s political agenda’, the book draws on the author’s own experiences in Parliament, as part of John Major’s campaign team in the 1995 Conservative party leadership election, and work for several Christian campaigning organisations.

“In so doing, political approaches of Christians working inside and outside the corridors of power are questioned. The author also challenges the way debates within the church have taken place, including the ‘tribalism’ that divides Christians into factions over issues like homosexuality.

“Tackling subjects such as sexual ethics, family policy, disestablishment, war and the arms trade, the book argues that Christians must reject the quest for power and influence that so often characterises their political involvement. He calls on the church, instead, to embrace a new politics based upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book concludes by calling for the church to return to her roots as a subversive political movement that accepts Jesus’ radical call to embrace the values of the Kingdom of God.”

New course

For some years Spurgeon’s College has offered an MTh in Anabaptist and Baptist Studies. A number of people associated with the Anabaptist Network have taken the modules on Anabaptism. It has been decided to broaden the scope of the course to an MTh in Radical Free Church Movements. The existing modules will still be offered, but gradually new modules will be added. The first of these, which is in preparation, is on Radical Free Church Movements in the 19th century. For details contact Ian Randall on 020 8653 0850.

Anabaptism Today

The October 2003 issue includes the following:

- An article by Eleanor Kreider on worship that is Jesus-centred.
- Church after Christendom: an exploration of the fourth of the Anabaptist Network’s core convictions.
- Church from Scratch: John Freeman tells the story of an emerging church in Essex with Anabaptist values.

- Anabaptism on the web: Jared Diener introduces the Anabaptist resources and sites now available on the Internet.

Complimentary copies of *Anabaptism Today* are available on request. Back issues are available at half price (£2). An index of authors and subjects can also be supplied. To subscribe to *Anabaptism Today* or to renew your subscription, send a cheque for £10 (one year's subscription) payable to 'Anabaptist Network Trust' to the address below. Individual issues cost £4.

Study groups

Study groups meet in various parts of the UK:

Bristol: Ruth Gouldbourne, Bristol Baptist College, Duncan House, The Promenade, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3NF (0117 946 7050)

Oxford: Trisha Dale, 4 Mistletoe Green, Oxford OX4 7FY (01865 773403)

North London: Vic Thiessen, 14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ (020 8340 8775)

South London: Alun Morinan, 37 Piquet Road, London SE20 7XY (020 8778 7018)

West Midlands: Derrick Faux: 58 Lightwoods Hill, Smethwick, West Midlands B67 5EB (0121 434 3597)

Yorkshire: Jonathan Blakeborough, 20 Arundel Grove, Woodthorpe, York YO24 2RZ (01904 703710). *Now in Leeds/Bradford and York/Hull.*

Edinburgh: Jim Purves, Bristo Baptist Church, Buckingham Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3DJ (0131 332 3682)

Portadown: Tim Foley: 60 Gilford Road, Portadown, Co. Armagh BT63 5EF (028 3833 7260)

New study groups?

New study groups may begin soon in Leyland, Liverpool, Belfast and Dublin. Please let us know if you are interested in joining one of these or starting a group elsewhere.

Introducing the Anabaptists

Who were the Anabaptists and why are Christians in Britain today interested in this tradition? Every so often we offer a day seminar introducing this movement and its contemporary significance.

If you are new to the Anabaptist Network or would like to discover more about the Anabaptist movement and its distinctive approach to radical discipleship and following Jesus, a special *Cross Currents* seminar (co-sponsored by the London Mennonite Centre and the Anabaptist Network) may be of interest.

Saturday 29 November (10.00-4.30): led by Stuart Murray Williams and Karen Stallard

Through stories, pictures and drama, this seminar will introduce participants to the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement in the 16th century. What did it mean to be an Anabaptist? Why were these people persecuted? What did they believe? What kinds of churches did they plant? What was distinctive about the way they lived?

To book a place, contact the London Mennonite Centre, 14 Shepherd's Hill, London N6 5AQ (0845 450 0214). Fee: £18 (£9 if unwaged).

Other events

Bridge Builders offers mediation services and training/consultancy in conflict transformation for churches. For further information, please contact Alastair McKay (alastairmckay@menno.org.uk).

22-26 March 2004: Skills Training for Mediation and Facilitation in the Church, led by Alastair McKay and Kirsten Zenger, **at the LMC.**

28 June-2 July 2004 (provisional dates): Skills Training for Mediation in the Church, led by Richard Blackburn and Alastair McKay, in **Dunblane, Scotland.**

19-23 July 2004: Skills Training for Mediation and Facilitation in the Church, led by Alastair McKay and Dave Brubaker, **at the LMC.**

11-15 October 2004: Skills Training for Mediation and Facilitation in the Church, led by Alastair McKay and Carolyn Schrock-Shenk, **in the Midlands.**

Cross-Currents seminar programme: A date for your 2004 diary – on 6 March, Denny Weaver will lead a seminar based on the theme of his book, *The Nonviolent Atonement*.

Christian Ecology Link is a member-based charity working to bring environmental concerns to the church, and bring Christian thought to bear on environmental matters. Its conference, 'Sowing the Seed' is on 1 November 2003 at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2 from 11.00 to 5.30. The keynote speaker is the Rt Rev James Jones, who will speak on 'Earthing the Gospel'.

For more information, contact CEL, 3 Bond Street, Lancaster LA1 3ER or ring 01524 33858 or email info@christian-ecology.org.uk

Urban Expression

Urban Expression is an inner-city church planting agency with Anabaptist values that works through self-funding teams. There are currently five centres in East London, and a wider network of urban church planters in other cities who share these values is being formed. For recent news and further information, please write to Urban Expression, PO Box 35238, London E1 0YA or visit the website at: www.urbanexpression.org.uk

www.anabaptistnetwork.com

If you haven't visited the Network's website for a while (or ever), why not visit this and see what's available there? The site has been developed in many ways during the past year. Recent additions include:

- An extensive links page to other Anabaptist sites
- Study courses that can be downloaded free of charge
- Information about forthcoming events
- A guide/commentary to the 'London Anabaptist Walk'
- Summaries of other radical movements (Lollards, Waldensians, etc.)
- Articles first published in *Anabaptism Today* on the Network's core convictions

Look out for further developments in the next few months. We have received permission to put 16th century source material on the site – most of which is not available on any other website. And there will also be news about the resource houses.

Help wanted: the website has been developed through the efforts of Will Newcomb of Metanoia Book Service and Jared Diener. They have done a great job. But as the site grows, we want to find someone willing to act as the webmaster, someone with the time and skills to develop the site further and update it regularly. Could you do this?

Other news

Finally, some other news that didn't quite fit into earlier sections:

- Alan & Eleanor Kreider's *Becoming a Peace Church* has been translated into Korean by the Korean Anabaptist Centre in Seoul. We have a copy – available free of charge to anyone who reads Korean!
- The Network was represented for the first time at the Greenbelt Festival, where a frequent question asked was simply 'So, what is an Anabaptist?'
- We gladly accepted an invitation from the Evangelical Alliance to offer at the end of September an Anabaptist contribution to their Commission on 'Faith, Church and Nation'
- From October Sue Haines, who has been on the Workshop team for five years and has just finished a Masters degree in systematic theology, is working part-time for Wood Green Mennonite Church, as the paid member of a team of four elders.
- The 21st year of Workshop has launched well with learners from a wider catchment geographically and denominationally. But Noel needs to find colleges to validate the centres in London, Leeds and Bristol.

About this newsletter

Thrice-yearly newsletters from the Anabaptist Network are sent free of charge to subscribers to our journal, *Anabaptism Today*, and to others who are on our mailing list because you have asked to be or have attended events we have organised. The newsletters report on recent activities and contain news of future events arranged by the Network or our partner organisations.

However, if you are surprised to receive this and would prefer not to receive future issues, please inform us and we will remove your name from the distribution list.

Do also contact us if you would like to receive email versions of this newsletter, a complimentary copy of *Anabaptism Today*, or if you want further information about anything.

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