

Anabaptist Network News

Relating and Resourcing

We are quite often asked what the Anabaptist Network is. Sometimes there is a hint of suspicion in the question. Is this a new denomination or institution? Will it compete for the time and energy of Christians or diminish their commitment to their own churches?

Usually I respond by emphasising the two main purposes of the Network:

- *Linking together* Christians from many backgrounds who find inspiration in the Anabaptist tradition, but whose friends and other church members do not share this enthusiasm.
- *Providing resources* to enable people to draw on the Anabaptist tradition – its rich and diverse history, its distinctive values and its contemporary significance.

A recent email is typical of what we are about. **Pete Jones** writes: 'I'm just writing a quick note to ask whether there are any AN members/affiliates in the Merseyside/Wirral area. I know there isn't a study group, but I was wondering if anyone wanted just to meet up and chat – not necessarily create a study group, just some fellowship with likeminded Anabaptists. I don't mind my name and email being published in the AN newsletter in case there's anyone in need of contact.' (If you want to respond, contact Pete at jonesylar@yahoo.com).

Relating and resourcing are certainly core purposes of the Network. We have no ambition to become a large institution or create a new denomination. We are interested in equipping followers of Jesus to be faithful disciples and to engage creatively with contemporary culture. We believe that insights from Anabaptism are particularly helpful in our post-Christendom context, but we also value the contributions of other traditions and expect most people in the Network will find ways of integrating into their own churches what they learn from Anabaptism.

The conferences we organise often explore resonances between Anabaptism and other traditions. The resources on our website are intended for use in many different settings. Increasingly we are being invited to offer Anabaptist insights in conversations and conferences on various topics. And we want to provide support and resources for our partner organisations in the **Root and Branch** network, whose Anabaptist convictions are being outworked in peacemaking, urban church planting, mediation, campaigning for justice and other ways.

What we are beginning to find, though, is that people from beyond the churches are encountering Christian faith via Anabaptism. The article this month, written by **Graham Paley**, is a fascinating and encouraging example of this. And some people are creating new churches with explicitly Anabaptist values at their core. In an emerging post-Christendom culture, neither development is surprising. So relating and resourcing will continue to be our dual vocation, but we will need to expand what we offer and to engage with a wider audience. We would welcome any suggestions you may have to enable us to respond to this challenge.

In the meantime, read on for an update on news, events and activities around the Network.

Stuart Murray Williams

Events

15-16 December 2005
Anabaptist theology forum. Main subject: *Christian Perfection*.

14 January 2006
Anabaptist Network & Urban Expression day in Melton Mowbray.

11 February 2006
An Urban Expression *Open Day* (to find out more) in East London

25-26 February 2006
Second weekend of the *Crucible* course in Birmingham. Subject: *The Urban Challenge*.

13-17 March 2006
A Bridge Builders course: *Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training for Senior Church Leaders*.

25 March 2006
Anabaptist Network day event at Annan on *Practical Anabaptism*.

8-9 April 2006
Third weekend of the *Crucible* course in Birmingham. Subject: *Emerging Church*.

1 July 2006
Anabaptist Network event in Birmingham on *Faith and Politics after Christendom*.

4 November 2006
Anabaptist Network/ Methodist conference: Cliff College, Calver, Derbyshire.

Drawn to Anabaptism

The article by Graham Paley is an abbreviated version of one of several articles in a new series on the Network's website.

Under the heading 'Drawn to Anabaptism' we are inviting Christians from various traditions and denominations to explain their interest in Anabaptism and how Anabaptist perspectives interact with their own tradition.

We have already posted articles written by New Church, Anglican, Pentecostal and Quaker contributors, and we await promised articles from United Reformed, Methodist and Baptist writers. Others are in the pipeline, and we are hoping to include articles from Salvation Army, Orthodox and Catholic writers.

See www.anabaptistnetwork.com/articles. If you would like to offer an article, please let us know.

Conferences 2006

During the past month we have been planning our conference schedule for 2006. There are 4 events planned in different parts of the country. Further details of these conferences will appear on our website and in the next newsletter, once these are finalised, but we can announce now the following events:

On Saturday **14 January** the East Midlands Baptist Association has invited the Network, in partnership with Urban Expression, to present a day, *Creating Church on the Margins*, in Melton Mowbray, exploring the Anabaptist tradition and the challenge of mission from the margins.

On Saturday **25 March** the Anabaptist Network study group in Lockerbie is organising an event in Annan – our first Network event in Scotland. The subject will be *Practical Anabaptism*.

On Saturday **1 July** in Birmingham the Network will host a book launch for the next book in our 'After Christendom' series, *Faith and Politics after Christendom*, and a day conference on the same theme. Speakers will include Jonathan Bartley, Andrew Bradstock and Alan Storkey.

On Saturday **4 November** Cliff College (Calver, in Derbyshire) will host and co-sponsor a day event exploring the Anabaptist and Methodist traditions. In particular, we will be investigating Christian initiation and discipleship.

News

Lakeland gathering: members of the Network in northwest England and southwest Scotland gathered in July at the historic Baptist chapel in Hawkshead Hill, Cumbria. Dating from the 17th century and with an outside baptistery, this was a great venue for the first Anabaptist meeting in this part of the country since the Network began in 1991. Further meetings are planned here on 21 January and 20 May 2006

Theology forum: the next event is scheduled for 15-16 December 2005. The main subject will be 'Christian Perfection'. Speakers include Phil Meadows, Chris Rowland and Stuart Murray Williams. If you are interested in being involved in this or future events, please contact us for an invitation.

Crucible: this course, jointly sponsored by our Root and Branch partners Urban Expression and Workshop (and Alove), explores church planting, urban mission and emerging church. 30+ people registered for the first weekend (29-30 October). The next weekends are on 25-26 February and 8-9 April), and further participants are welcome to join the course then. For further details, see www.cruciblecourse.net

Fit4Life: we have now received new stock from Australia of this popular CD on healthy church life. Our top client is the East Midlands Baptist Association, which has now bought 50 copies for use in their churches! Copies are available via the website priced at £10 (including postage and packing).

Atonement: for those interested in the debate about our understanding of atonement, there is a report on the Evangelical Alliance symposium (held in July) on the website. You can also find there a survey form where you can record your own choice among several ways of interpreting the work of Christ.

Resource houses: Simon Mattholie and Andy Potter have both moved recently and now live too close to other resource houses to justify holding on to their stock of resources, so they will be passing these on to:

- Andrew & Kath Dodd (Chapel Cottage, Hawkshead Hill, Cumbria LA22 0PW; 015394 36451), and
- Jonathan Blakeborough (20 Arundel Grove, Woodthorpe, York YO24 2RZ; 01904 703710).

www.anabaptistnetwork.com

We have added quite a lot of new material to the website since the last newsletter:

- A new section on 'Anabaptist Practices in the Local Church', with resources on *interactive preaching* (written by Jeremy Thomson), Anabaptist perspectives on *communion* and several articles on the practice of *footwashing*.
- A study guide on the *After Christendom* series, summarising the first two books and offering resources for further study.
- Three articles by *Alan Kreider* on the meaning of 'salt of the earth', the history of mission and why Alan and Eleanor speak together as they do.
- A second *cartoon-style* booklet designed by Karen Stallard, re-telling the story of Dirk Willems.
- A new series of specially commissioned articles (as mentioned above) exploring the Anabaptist tradition from different *denominational perspectives*.

After Christendom

The 'After Christendom' series continues to sell well. *Church after Christendom* has sold out after 5 months and is currently being reprinted. *Post-Christendom* has also been reprinted.

By the time you read this the publisher will have received the manuscript of the third book in the series, Jonathan Bartley's *Faith and Politics after Christendom*, which should be available from June 2006.

We are continuing to talk with other possible authors about contributions beyond the fourth and fifth books planned: *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (2007) and *Reading the Bible after Christendom* (2008).

These books, and many others, already are or will be available from Metanoia Book Service: 0845 4500 214; email metanoia@menno.org.uk

Advance Notice

We will include more details about the following events in future newsletters, but for your diaries and information:

European Mennonite theological forum: Vic Thiessen is organising another event on 22-23 June 2006 at the Guy Chester Centre, Muswell Hill. Topic: 'Is God Non-violent?'

Anabaptist study weeks in 2006: Andrew Francis, formerly the Network's development worker, is helping to organise three Anabaptist-oriented study weeks. The first is a theological reading party (on the writings of John Howard Yoder); the second is a church leaders' week on 'radical church principles'; and the final one is on spirituality. These will be half-board and based at a retreat house in SW France. Full details will be available in early December from our website, or on www.chezlespelerins.co.uk or from Andrew on 01793-705484

Alan & Eleanor Kreider are planning another visit to England in May/June 2007. We hope to have another residential conference during that time, with Alan & Ellie as our guests (probably on 26-28 May). Their visit may also coincide with the launch of their *Worship and Mission after Christendom*.

Urban Expression

For those interested in Urban Expression, an urban mission agency with Anabaptist values, a newsletter is available (by post or email) three times a year. Do ask if you would like to receive this: enquiries@urbanexpression.org.uk

Recent developments include: the launch of the Crucible course; teams are forming in Glasgow and Manchester; a new governance structure is in place to enable further growth; and we have re-focused on pioneer mission by celebrating the completion of one of our church plants and releasing this new church to develop under its own steam.

We are looking forward to our annual Urban Expression Associates' Day on 12 November, with Roy Searle (Northumbria Community) as our guest speaker.

London Mennonite Centre

We want to highlight one of the Cross-Currents events in 2006. On **Saturday 11 February**, Viv Lassetter will be leading a day entitled *Women and the Bible*. For further information, contact 0845 450 0214 or email lmc@menno.org.uk

We mentioned in the last issue of the newsletter that we hope to co-sponsor an event with *Men, Women & God* on the theme 'Women and Men after Christendom'. This is likely to be in 2007 but, in the meantime, this Cross-Currents event may be of interest.

Bridge Builders

Mediation and Facilitation Skills Training for Senior Church Leaders

13-17 March 2006, Hertfordshire

A residential course equipping Christian leaders with practical skills for responding constructively to conflict. Cost: £675. For further information call 0845 4500 214 or email: bb@menno.org.uk

Workshop

This September Workshop has launched its 23rd year with prayerful excitement. All 5 centres are going well. Each of the teams has experienced and established folk and new members working side by side. Building relationships with a new company of learners is always exciting and we can already feel we are going to have a good year learning together. They are from a range of backgrounds and experiences and some have already demonstrated they have much to bring to the course.

Our one slight disappointment is that numbers are down a little on last year, which obviously presents its challenges, but we are determined to find a positive way forward. However, your prayers around the practicalities of this would be much appreciated.

We are grateful for all the support that many of the members of the Network already give to the programme. We want to remind you that if you have never visited Workshop or would like to drop in from time to time to see what we are doing, there is always a welcome for you.

If you want to know any more about the dates, venues or topics being taught on any particular weekend then please phone 0114 2888816 or visit our website: www.workshop.org.uk

Advanced Workshop

The first year of the two-year course came to an end in July and students have now embarked on their second year. A few have dropped out, realising the demands on time are too much for them in their present circumstances. However, 11 students continue to study for the Licence in Theology and two more are doing the course but not studying for the LTh.

If you have completed Workshop, have a first degree in another subject and would like to pursue further study in Ethics, Hermeneutics and Apologetics with a significant Anabaptist element then AW is for you! The next course commences in October 2006 and the intention is to hold it in Birmingham once a suitable venue has been found. The course involves attendance for one whole weekend every two months over two years and the completion of twelve essays over that period.

The following are examples of debates started in AW lectures and continued on the website:

- The relevance of systematic theology to the ongoing life of the church
- Orthodoxy v orthopraxy
- The myth of Pauline communities
- The notion of omnigender rather than the dominant binary gender construct

And much more besides! For further information about AW, please contact Lloyd Pietersen at: advancedworkshop@anvil.org.uk

Contact Us

For further information about anything you have read in this newsletter, please contact us using the details below. Or you can ring Stuart Murray Williams on 01865 250914.

Please let us know if you change your address, if you would prefer to receive newsletters by email, or if you no longer wish to receive them.

If you have information for inclusion in the next newsletter, please let us have this by 1 January 2006. And if you have any suggestions for the continuing development of the Network, please let us know.