

Anabaptist Network Newsletter

February 2003

Looking back

2002 was a busy year for the Anabaptist Network. We had not previously attempted to run **four** conferences in nine months, including two in the same week in November. There were reasons for these events all happening in close succession and not being spread out more evenly, but this may also indicate growing interest in the relevance of the Anabaptist tradition and its distinctive insights in a world where traditional forms of discipleship, mission and church are not working well.

All four events were well attended. Almost 100 participated in the English Radicals conference in Amersham in March. Our residential event near Birmingham in June (on 'Re-imagining Church') was fully booked. 50 people attended the 'Mission in Post-Christendom' consultation in November, and 60 more spent a day together in North London exploring the theme 'Men, Women and God's Word'. Reports on these last two events can be found below.

What have we learned from these events?

- Partnership with other networks results in good attendance and richer learning.
- Different people are interested in different aspects of the Anabaptist tradition. Hardly anyone came to all four events, and at some events two thirds of participants had not been to a Network event before.
- The radical Christian tradition (of which Anabaptism is a part) resonates deeply with many Christians today.
- Post-Christendom, where the church is on the margins, is presenting new challenges and new opportunities for faithful and creative discipleship.

Comings and goings

The past year has also been a time of arrivals and departures for key individuals within the Network.

Mark & Mary Thiessen Nation to the USA after 5 years at the London Mennonite Centre.

Andrew Francis (our former development worker) to France for a sabbatical year.

Dave Nussbaum (one of our trustees) to Berlin for half of each week to head up the work of Transparency International.

Vic & Kathy Thiessen and family to the London Mennonite Centre.

Tim Foley and family to Portadown, where he is working with the Greenfields Community Church and hoping to establish a new Mennonite Centre.

Jared Dienar in September as the Network's first Research Assistant.

Jonathan Blakeborough and **Jonathan Bartley** as new members of the Network's steering group.

Bryce Staniland as the new Network treasurer, taking over from Lloyd Pietersen.

Looking ahead

2003 is at present completely conference-free! We are planning towards a number of further events, one of which may take place in the autumn, but we are concentrating at present on a number of different initiatives. Our primary aims are still to offer resources from the Anabaptist tradition and to link together relationally those who find its insights helpful and want to explore discipleship in the radical tradition.

In order to achieve these more effectively, we are working on a number of projects:

- Identifying **contact people** throughout the UK to whom we can refer those who ask for resources on Anabaptism, mission, peace and justice, discipleship, etc.
- Providing a basic **resource pack** (books, tapes, videos, journals, etc.) in the homes of these contact people.
- Upgrading our **web site** to make resources more readily accessible to those who use the Internet.
- Producing 3 new **courses**, designed for group or individual study, which draw on biblical, Anabaptist and contemporary resources.
- Exploring the possibility of establishing Anabaptist/Mennonite **centres** in other parts of the UK.

Help wanted

In order to make progress with these projects, we need your help. Would you be interested in any of the following?

- Becoming a contact person and housing a resource pack in your home.
- Helping to finance a resource pack – or suggesting/offering books etc. for this.
- If you have skills in this area, suggesting ways we can improve our web site.
- Piloting one of the new courses in your church or as an individual.
- Getting involved in discussions about further centres.

If you are, or have other responses, please get in touch with us (address below).

Study groups

Study groups meet in various parts of the UK. If you want to join a group or try one out, ask for dates and venues.

Northern Ireland: Janet and Joe Campbell, 17 Church Avenue, Holywood, Co. Down BT 18 9JB (0123 175 974).

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

Oxford: Steven Willis, 2 Wales St, Kings Sutton, Banbury, Oxon OX17 3RR (01295 811 264)

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)

South Hants: Les and Lin Gibbons, 7 Jacomb Place, Bridgemary, Gosport, Hants PO13 0LS (01329 312553)

West Midlands: Barbara Smith, 3 Highland Road, Cradley Heath B64 5NB (01384 412 656)

Yorkshire: Jonathan Blakeborough, 20 Arundel Grove, Woodthorpe, York YO24 2RZ (01904 703 710)

NEW GROUP IN EDINBURGH

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

NEW GROUP IN PORTADOWN

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

Recent events

Mission in Post-Christendom

What might mission look like in a society where the church is marginal? Where do Christians find effective and meaningful forms of evangelism? How might the post-Christendom church engage in political and social affairs?

These were some of the questions addressed in a consultation on 6 November 2002 in Birmingham jointly sponsored by the Anabaptist Network and the Mission Department of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

About 50 participants (mostly Baptist ministers or mission enablers) engaged in a mixture of plenary sessions and seminars, exploring these issues. The Anabaptist Network presenters were Jonathan Bartley, Juliet Kilpin, Stuart Murray Williams and Tim Foley.

It was clear from comments towards the end of the day (and subsequently) that the consultation had identified for many participants an issue they were vaguely aware of but felt ill-equipped to deal with. There was a plea for further help to grapple with the realities of post-Christendom and the impact of this shift on local church life.

This is where we hope the Anabaptist Network may be able to make a useful contribution. For the Anabaptist tradition has been alert to the effects of the Christendom mindset for a long time and has developed alternative ways of looking at a range of issues involved in discipleship, mission and church life today.

Men, Women and God's Word

The Anabaptist Network, the Men Women and God network and the London Mennonite Centre co-sponsored on 9 November 2002 a day event in North London to explore ways that the Bible has been used to oppress and to liberate, to invite and to exclude.

Among the 60 participants was chair of the MWG and one of the organisers, Alison Grieve, whose 'stream of consciousness' style reflection gives a really good feel of the day:

'It was a day long looked for – the planning and thinking had been over many months – but which nonetheless sneaked up on me...so did 10am...and the realisation that we were about to start, and Mary and Stuart had just met and seemed to feel that, despite not having discussed at length what they were going to do, it would work...and it did...then an interesting interlude with David Porter (instead of going to a workshop) learning more about the situation in Northern Ireland ...then there was the buzz at lunchtime, and the opportunity to talk and to visit LMC...and the excellent food and the feeling of people being valued (which was what David Porter said was so important when you take people's Saturday and was something we had talked about early on in our planning meetings)...an unexpected meeting with the sister in law of one of my ex-prayer partners, who I had not expected to see, nor she me...as usual for MWG events, the people who came were not our regulars...and (on-site artist) Rachel's pictures and clay...then the afternoon workshop with Tim, and Fran's extraordinary and exciting plenary, and Elaine's summing up and the worship session, which was exceptionally moving...it was a celebration of different gifts and different viewpoints and perspectives...there were genuine opportunities to look through others' eyes, and the challenge is to try to integrate some of those insights within one's own...and always to remain open to the possibility daily that one might be able to do this again...and again...For me it achieved in large part one of the things I had hoped for from when we had first discussed it – that it should teach us more about Anabaptists – who they were and who they are – and that we should help them also to achieve some new viewpoints...'

Anabaptism Today

The February 2003 issue includes the following articles:

- To mark the 50th anniversary in June of the London Mennonite Centre, an article by Alan Kreider on its history and ethos, and an article by its present director, Vic Thiessen, on its present and future.
- An interview with Stephen Willis, Les Gibbons and Jonathan Blakeborough (all of whom have military backgrounds) about their commitment to working for peace and their responses to threats of war against Iraq and the 'war on terror'.
- An exploration of the second of the 7 core convictions of the Anabaptist Network.

Sale!!

As *Anabaptism Today* enters its second decade of publication, you can buy back issues at half price, postage free!

Send orders for issues 15 to 28 to AT Back Issues, London Mennonite Centre, 14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ. Please make cheques for £2 per issue payable to 'Anabaptism Today', and don't forget to include your name, address and post code! First come – first served!

Theological forum

For 24 hours twice a year the Anabaptist Network theological forum meets, usually at Offa House, near Leamington Spa. This normally consists of 12-15 people from various traditions (currently Baptist, Anglican, House Church, Quaker and Mennonite) interested in exploring Anabaptist theology.

In March 2003, this group will be hosting an enlarged 24 hour forum for a wider gathering at the usual venue. Subjects to be discussed include: 'The War on Terror' (Christopher Rowland), 'Anabaptist Hermeneutics Revisited' (Stuart Murray Williams) and 'Reinventing Christendom' (Nigel Wright).

The forum convenor is Ruth Gouldbourne, Bristol Baptist College, Duncan House, The Promenade, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3NF (0117 946 7050). Please contact her if you want further information.

Australian visitor

We are looking forward to the UK visit between February and April of **Graeme Littleton**, the leader of the Breakwater Community, a few miles from Melbourne, Australia. This Baptist monastic community has an Eastern Orthodox liturgy and Anabaptist values! Graeme is travelling widely and speaking at various events. If you would like to meet him, please contact us for more details.

Urban Expression

Urban Expression is an inner-city church planting agency with Anabaptist values that works through self-funding teams.

For recent news and further details, write to Urban Expression, PO Box 35238, London E1 0YA or visit the website: www.urbanexpression.org.uk

London Mennonite Centre

The centre offers encouragement and resources to those seeking to learn more about radical Christian discipleship in the Anabaptist tradition. Current ministries include seminars, Metanoia book service, Bridge Builders mediation and conflict transformation service, a library and retreat facilities. Contact the London Mennonite Centre for more information at 14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ. Tel: 020:8340 8775, email: lmc@menno.org.uk, website: www.menno.org.uk

50th anniversary celebrations

The London Mennonite Centre is delighted to be celebrating 50 years of the Centre's work this year. There will be a weekend of celebrations on 7-8 June 2003, which includes an Anabaptist walk in the City, a morning of story-telling, reminiscing and looking to the future, a lunch and a celebratory service. Invitations are going to everyone who has worked at the LMC and all those who have had significant involvement with the Centre over the last 50 years. A good number of friends and colleagues joining us from North America are expected. If you are interested in taking part, please contact Jill Gerig for further information (jgerig@menno.org.uk).

Cross-Currents seminar programme

There is still time to book for the last of the Spring Cross-Currents events, a one-day seminar co-sponsored with the Anabaptist Network. **Anabaptist Perspectives on Parenting** is on Saturday 22 March and will be led by Kathy and Vic Thiessen. For more information or to book for this event, please contact Jane Collett on 020 8340 8775 or email: crosscurrents@menno.org.uk.

Bridge Builders

Bridge Builders offers mediation services and training/consultancy in conflict transformation for churches. Future dates include:

31 March–4 April 2003: London. *Skills Training for Mediation and Facilitation in the Church*, led by Alastair McKay/Kirsten Zerger.

16-19 June 2003: London. *Conflict Consulting*, led by Dave Brubaker/Alastair McKay.

6-10 October 2003: Bristol. *Skills Training for Mediation in the Church*, led by Richard Blackburn/Alastair McKay.

Workshop

Noel Moules writes: 'Workshop is nearing the halfway point of its 20th year and things are going well. Our six teams nationwide are functioning with great commitment and enthusiasm and the some 190 students that are currently involved across the country are doing well and enjoying grappling with the challenges of the ideas and themes that we are working with. Please pray:

1. That current students will continue to grow in spirit and understanding through this year.
2. That all the team members will continue to be strengthened and encouraged in all they are doing.
3. That we will have wisdom in finding and choosing some new teachers for several of the centres for next September.
4. For the production of the 2003/04 Workshop prospectus and its use in promotion.'

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 tell us and we will remove your name from the distribution list. We do not want to send you unwanted mail. See below for contact details.

Please 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. If you have news or events to advertise, please send this to us. We cannot promise to include it – this will depend on available space and relevance – but we are happy to receive contributions.

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