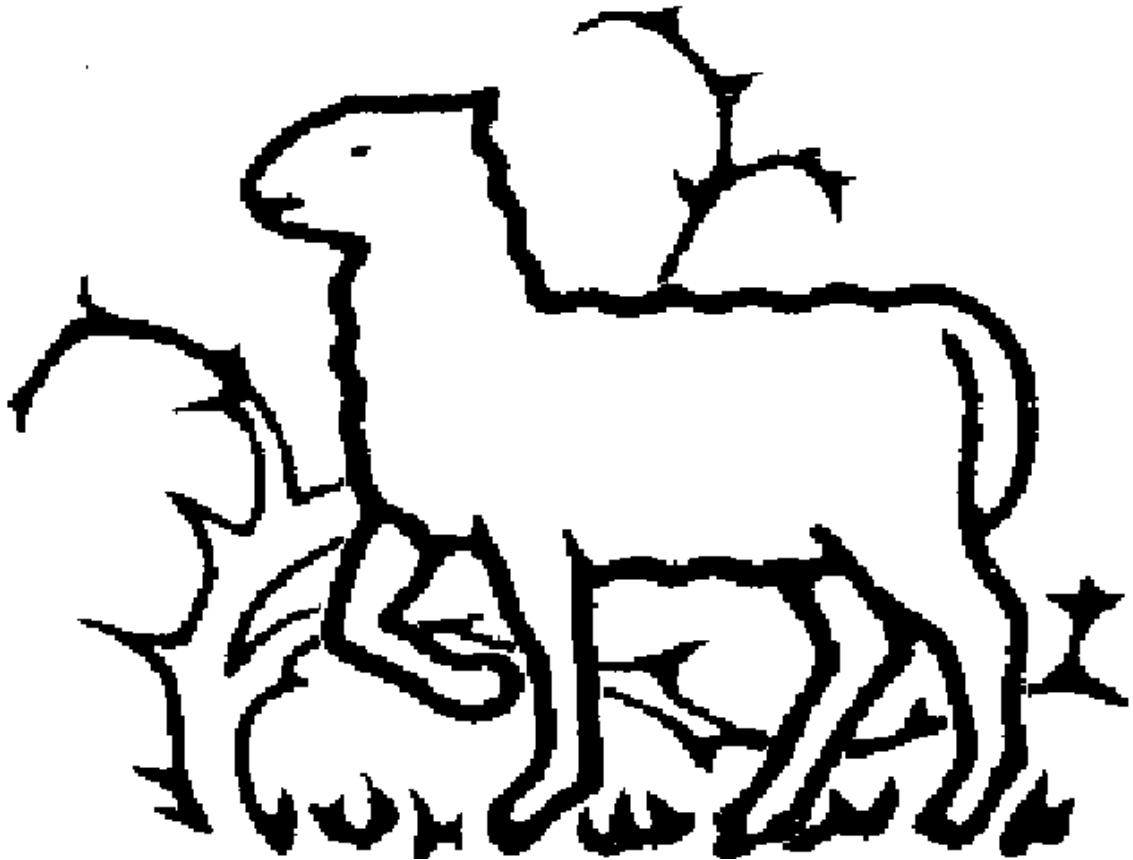


ON THE ROAD



**Newsletter
of the
*Anabaptist Association of
Australia and New Zealand***

**No.11
March 2001**

**Homepage on the internet
<http://www.anabaptist.asn.au>**

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(COVER SYMBOL: The lamb in the midst of briars is a traditional Anabaptist symbol. It illustrates the suffering Lamb of God, who calls the faithful to obedient service and discipleship on the road. This particular rendition is "From Hymnal A Worship Book. Copyright 1992. Reprinted with permission of Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, PA, USA")

FROM THE EDITORS

“To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.”
Henri Bergson

“Just because everything is different doesn’t mean that anything has changed.”
Irene Peter

Not everything is different but change has come to *On The Road*. Doug Hynd as editor faithfully guided this newsletter through its first three years and ten editions. The newsletter found a name and became a place to find news, book reviews and articles on Anabaptist topics. Well done Doug. Now he has passed the editorship on to us.

The makeup of the AAANZ committee has changed too. Ian Duckham has stepped aside as president after an intense time of dealing with lawyers and Immigration Department officials to get us to Australia. Thanks Ian for your leadership over the past couple of years. The new committee is:

Officers

Doug Hynd	President
Chris Marshall	Vice President
Gary Baker	Treasurer
Ross Coleman	Secretary
Bessie Pereira	Membership Secretary
Tim Costello	Public Officer
(Marcus Curnow - Proxy)	

Area Representatives

Ian Duckham, Ian Packer	Perth
Ed and Karlin Love	Tasmania
Neil and Saralyn Horsburg	Melbourne

Another change involves this newsletter. We will continue publishing at least four times a year as an Anabaptist forum for exchanging ideas, news, and book information but not as a place for major articles. If there is interest, we will publish an Occasional Papers that would feature lengthier articles.

All of this depends on you, the reader. We need your ideas, letters, book reviews (of whatever length), and news items to make *On The Road* work. We also want to hear your response to an occasional journal of longer articles. Do we need another Christian journal? Would you read it? Would you pay a subscription for it?

One more change is a new email address for this newsletter. Any letters, book reviews, suggestions, news, etc. can be sent to ontheroad@today.com.au.

Change. Hopefully it will bring maturity as we seek to follow Jesus on the road.

Shalom,

Mark and Mary Hurst

P R E S I D E N T ' S R E P O R T

Moving forward

Friends,

The Association has reached an important stage in its life. The hard work of the past three years has born fruit in the return of Mark and Mary Hurst to Australia to work for the Association. Mark and Mary are now settling in to a unit in Sydney and have completed most of the tasks associated with setting up house and all the associated paperwork that comes with taking up residence in Australia.

On behalf of the Committee and Mark and Mary I would like to thank you all for the financial, practical and prayer support that you have provided over the past few years.

Roles and Resources

We are now entering a new stage in the life and ministry of the Association. At the recent AAANZ meeting in Melbourne during the conference the key theme that emerged from the reflection of the members was the potential role for the Association in networking and providing resources for a range of initiatives in peacemaking and community and church building across Australia in which the Anabaptist tradition was finding a living expression.

It is important to be aware that the Hursts are currently being supported largely by resources raised in the United States and Canada and channelled through the Eastern Mennonite Mission Board. The Association is responsible for providing program costs for specific initiatives and the operation of the Association, including for example, workers compensation, insurance and accounting costs related to reporting to the Australian Taxation Office and the dreaded GST. In the longer term the Association is responsible for raising an increasing level of support for the Hursts from within Australia and New Zealand.

Initiatives

A number of specific initiatives have already been provisionally identified in discussions held at the conference and will be the subject of discussion by the Committee over the next few months. These initiatives could include:

- **Support for regional activities, where substantial travel costs would be involved for the Hursts. New Zealand, Tasmania and Perth come to mind as areas where air travel would be required.**
- **Upgrading of the Association's web site.**
- **Development of educational material on peacemaking with a specific Australian/New Zealand focus.**

What can you do?

To help in the work of the Association there are some very specific things that you can do. For example:

- **Let us know about opportunities for the Hursts to exercise their ministry in your area. In addition to working to encourage and support members and friends of the Association Mark and Mary have professional skills and experience in peacemaking and conflict resolution and are available to work in a professional role.**
- **Provide regular financial support or make a one off gift to the Association to enable us to take specific initiatives along the lines mentioned above.**
- **Publicise the work of the Association to interested Christian friends and congregations. We are currently working on some new publicity material.**
- **Pray for the Hursts and the Committee as we seek wisdom in setting priorities.**

As the new president of the Association I need to hear from you. The gifts of discernment and encouragement are given to us to be used in the community of the church. There is no way that we will make good decisions if we do not have an active engagement with you all.

Peace,

**Doug Hynd
President**

THE VIEW FROM EPHESIANS FOUR

Someone asked us the other day if we like the title “pastoral workers”. Does it fit what we do? who we are? We said yes but wanted to clarify our understanding of what it means to be a pastor.

Paul says in Ephesians 4:12-13 that the role of pastors and teachers (along with apostles, prophets, and evangelists) is:

“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

In this passage, pastors are to be “equippers”, they are not to do everything themselves but prepare others “for the work of ministry”. And the goal of all of this activity is that we all grow up together and be like Jesus.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases this passage this way:

...pastors are “to train Christians in skilled servant work...until we’re all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God’s Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.” (481)

We like the phrase “fully developed within and without”. The journey of discipleship on the road with Jesus is both an inward and outward journey and as pastors we are to be nudging people along this road toward Christ-likeness. That is the work of pastors.

So we have named this column the “View From Ephesians Four”. We will report on how we are encouraging people in the Anabaptist Network along the road through our teaching, organizing, networking, listening, and praying activities.

The AAANZ committee provides direction, counsel, and feedback for the work we do and the life of the network. They are in the midst of refining our job description. It is one thing to pastor a single congregation but what does it mean to pastor a network? Any suggestions you can give the committee would be appreciated.

“Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Mark and Mary Hurst

m5hurst@hotmail.com

NEWS FROM AROUND THE NETWORK

(The following news release went out to Christian magazines in Australia and New Zealand and to Anabaptist media worldwide. Kudos to Bessie, Neil, Saralyn and the others in Melbourne who worked hard to organize this event.)

AAANZ Melbourne Conference

The Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) met in Melbourne for a conference January 25-28, 2001. The theme of the gathering was “Peacemaking, Reconciliation and Mission” and the setting was Whitley College, the Baptist theological college connected to the University of Melbourne. This was the second national conference since the AAANZ became incorporated as an Australian religious organization.

Conference participants welcomed Mark and Mary Hurst to Australia once again. The Hursts are Mennonite pastors from North America who began working in Australia in 1990, lost their visas at the end of 1995, and have now obtained Australian residency. They are the AAANZ pastoral workers responsible for organizing, resourcing, and pastoring people in both Australia and New Zealand who are interested in Anabaptism.

This particular conference was planned by a local Melbourne committee. Over the four days there were four main presentations, numerous workshops, a Saturday evening public event in a local town hall, free time to explore the city, and three suggested worship services on Sunday in local churches featuring speakers from the AAANZ.

Marita Munro, Lecturer at Whitley College, covered the historical and biblical basis for Anabaptism in the opening session. Gordon Preece, Lecturer at Ridley College, looked at Anabaptism and its relationship to the contemporary church scene in Australia. In session three, the Hursts spoke on Anabaptist perspectives on peacemaking and the fourth address was given by Ross Langmead, the Director of the School of World Missions at Whitley, on Anabaptist perspectives for mission. Each of the speakers spoke of how in one way or another they came into contact with Anabaptism through their biblical and theological training. John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus* was often mentioned as a book that was influential as an introduction to Anabaptism and the ethics of Jesus.

Workshops were led by AAANZ members and local resource people. The topics looked at ranged from dealing with conflict in churches to Anabaptist spirituality. The Saturday evening public address was given by Tim Costello, Baptist pastor, lawyer, author, and public speaker. His

talk was an attempt to pull together the themes from the conference and relate them to current issues. Tim used the current celebration of Federation as the context for his remarks.

The AAANZ plans to have these kind of gatherings at least every eighteen months to bring together like-minded people from across Australia and New Zealand. It is a time for fellowship, teaching, and encouragement for people who are often feeling quite alone in their Anabaptist way of life. Gordon Preece in his talk on contemporary issues said “Raising three children in the faith- without much help from the church - has made me more Anabaptist.” He said raising children in the face of “capitalistic consumerism” was one of the greatest challenges facing the church today. “How do we make disciples?” he asked. A very Anabaptist question to go away with!

M S H

(The following is a news release on a conference held recently in New Zealand and attended by Network members Mark Hurst and Colin Isaac.)

Peace In The Pacific Islands

pa’cific a. 1. peaceable 2.calm, tranquil

The very name “Pacific Islands” engenders a picture of tropical paradises where the sun always shines, the beaches are inviting, and life is relaxing and calm. Images pop into our heads of friendly natives dancing in grass skirts and handing out to tourists leis made from local flowers.

But sadly this picture of calm tranquillity has been shattered in recent times by ethnic tension, land disputes, coups, and open warfare. Fiji, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, French Polynesia and other Pacific Island names are now linked to unrest instead of pacific bliss.

A recent conference in Auckland, New Zealand brought together fourteen church leaders and journalists from seven Pacific Island countries around the theme “Communication: From Confrontation To Reconciliation.” The four-day event was sponsored by The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), an international organization based in London, England. The February 14 -17, 2001 meetings were a pre-congress consultation preparing for WACC’s international Congress to be held July 3-7, 2001 in the Netherlands on the same theme.

Mark Hurst, a Mennonite mission worker based in Australia, was one of the two resource people invited to provide biblical, theological, and

practical help in examining the reconciliation process. Colin Isaac, an Australian mediator who has studied at Eastern Mennonite University's Summer Peacebuilding Institute, was the other invited facilitator.

David Lin, WACC's regional director for Asia and the Pacific, led off with some opening remarks on the theme. He shared from his Chinese background about the two words "confrontation" and "reconciliation". The Chinese symbols for the word confrontation mean "to oppose" and "to resist". The symbols for reconciliation mean "harmony/together" and "understanding". The task for the consultation was to have some movement from opposition to harmony, from resistance to togetherness.

The first half of the conference concentrated on hearing the stories of the delegates. A woman radio journalist from French Polynesia remarked that even though the Pacific Islands are in close geographical vicinity to each other, the people do not know each others' stories.

But even doing something as commonplace as storytelling can be a delicate process in a conflicted setting. Delegates from the same country can represent different sides in a dispute. The four representatives from Fiji illustrated this well. One was an Indo-Fijian Muslim Television journalist. Another was a Chinese female Methodist Church pastor. A third was an indigenous Fijian grandmother and radio journalist and the fourth was a male indigenous Fijian newspaper columnist who had an Australian mother.

The conference was timely for these Fijian delegates. As this article is being written, the police and military in Fiji are on full alert awaiting the outcome of a court hearing on the legitimacy of the military-backed government, installed after a coup last year. The coup was driven by resentment among indigenous Fijians toward Indo-Fijians' increasing economic and political power.

The problem on the surface appears to be an ethnic one but delegates did not accept that as an easy way out. The tensions date back to colonial times under the British when Indians were brought to Fiji as indentured labourers to work in sugar-cane fields. The Indo-Fijian delegate said "People tell me to go home to India. My family has been in Fiji for three generations. I know no other home but Fiji."

French Polynesia, a group of 120 islands, is still in the throes of colonialism and many of their social problems grow out of the continued French presence. The recent testing of nuclear bombs in the area is one example of the French doing as they please in what they consider to be their territory. The local people have a different opinion.

One French Polynesian delegate said that the clash between the rich and the poor in their society has the potential to blow up into open warfare like what happened recently in the Solomon Islands.

A Solomon pastor said his country was known as the “Happy Isles” before it erupted into open warfare between armed militants of the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army and the Malatia Eagle Force. While he said the severe social unrest “caught everyone by surprise,” the “seed of the last twenty three months of conflict was sown in the last century.” The conflict has long-standing economic, social and political causes.

The personal impact of the fighting was highlighted in the storytelling of a Solomon Island woman pastor who does trauma counselling. She works with mothers and their children. She said the mothers’ response to the war was to announce to the fighters “Sons, come home. You’d break our hearts if you die.”

The final conference statement spoke of the need to foster self awareness, communication and dialogue, a commitment to change, methods to promote peace and justice, and a commitment to work at forgiveness, restitution and reconciliation.

One journalist from Fiji said he would be applying what he learned right away. He was returning to host a forum of people from all sides of the conflict in his country. The conversations will be filmed and televised for all to see. “Everyone talks about the need for reconciliation but no one is doing anything about it. That is why we called these people together.”

Pray for peace and reconciliation in the Pacific. Pray for that wisdom which is from above, wisdom that is “peaceable”. Pray that these pastors and journalists may discover a “harvest of justice, sown in peace” in their Pacific Islands.

M S H

22 February 2001

AAANZ Videos

The videos listed below are available to borrow. Contact Mark and Mary Hurst, 3/653 Princes Highway, Sutherland, NSW 2232 or at m5hurst@hotmail.com. We ask that you cover the mailing costs and be sure to return the videos in a reasonable amount of time.

- *Our Family Can Be Your Family* - An introduction to Mennonites. (28 min.)**
- *The Radicals* - Story of the beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism. (99 min.)**

- ***The London Story* - Looks at Mennonite mission work in London. (16min.)**
- ***Against Great Odds* - Story of the Mennonites in Ethiopia. (30 min.)**
- ***Witnessing To Christ In Today's World* - Stories of Anabaptist mission. (28 min.)**
- ***For Such A Time as This* - About Hong Kong Mennonites. (19 min.)**
- ***SELFHELP Crafts: World Stories* - Overview of SELFHELP Crafts. (30 min.)**
- ***The Past Is Present* - Dealing with land mines in Laos. (7 min.)**
- ***Restorative Justice* - A criminal justice alternative. (22 min.)**
- ***Reconciliation* - A different look at doing justice. (25 min.)**
- ***Eye For An Eye* - Looks at the death penalty. (25 min.)**
- ***Shared Sentence* - About people with loved ones in prison. (20 min.)**
- ***Crime: Mediating The Conflict* - Introduces Victim Offender Reconciliation. (11 min.)**
- ***Marietta Jaeger On Forgiveness* - Crime victim's journey to forgiveness. (28 min.)**
- ***Crime: The Broken Community* - New look at crime. (11 min.)**
- ***The Forgotten Neighbor* - Crime victims' stories. (10 min.)**
- ***VORP Mediation* - Steps involved in VORP. (20 min.)**
- ***Beyond The News Series:***
 - Sexual Abuse* (21 min.)**
 - Racism* (25 min.)**
 - Firearms Violence* (33 min.)**
 - Murder Close Up* (35 min.)**
 - TV Violence & Your Child* (33 min)**
 - TV Violence & You* (30 min.)**
- ***Cloud of Witnesses Series:***
 - Extending Our Lives* - Stories of Christians in Bolivia and Brazil. (55 min.)**
 - Facing The Powers* - African Christians deal with issues of faith. (49 min.)**
 - Rediscovering Anabaptism* - Story of modern-day British Anabaptists. (65 min.)**
- ***Living In Community* - Introduction to the Bruderhof. (18 min.)**
- ***After Sexual Abuse* - An incest survivor's journey to forgiveness. (52 min.)**

The following videos belong in the collection but are “out there” somewhere. If you have borrowed one of them, could you please return it. Thanks.

The Healing River, Conflict In The Church, You Chiefs Are Peacemakers, The Innocent, Hope For Bosnia, Peacemaking: Healing and Hope.

(The item below comes to us from Stuart Murray and the Anabaptist Network in Great Britain. As we in the AAANZ look at who we are and what we want to do, what is it we can learn from our fellow travellers in the UK?)

Anabaptist Network Great Britain: Core Convictions

Among the core convictions and commitments important to many of us are these:

1. Jesus is our example, teacher, friend, redeemer and Lord. He is the source of our life, the central reference point for our faith and lifestyle, for our understanding of church and our engagement with society. We are committed to following Jesus as well as worshipping him.

2. Jesus is the focal point of God's revelation. We are committed to a Jesus-centred approach to the Bible, and to the community of faith as the primary context in which we read the Bible and discern and apply its implications for discipleship.

3. Western culture is slowly emerging from the Christendom era when church and state jointly presided over a society in which all were assumed to be Christian. Whatever its positive contributions, Christendom seriously distorted the gospel, marginalised Jesus and has left the churches ill-equipped for mission in a post-Christendom culture. As we reflect on this, we are committed to learning from the experience and perspectives of movements such as Anabaptism that rejected standard Christendom assumptions and pursued alternative ways of thinking and behaving.

4. The frequent association of the church with status, wealth and force has been inappropriate for followers of Jesus and has damaged our witness. We are committed to exploring ways of being good news to the poor, powerless and persecuted.

5. Churches are called to be resource centres for discipleship and mission, multi-voiced worshipping communities that sustain hope as we wait for God's kingdom, and places of friendship and mutual accountability. We are committed to nurturing and developing such churches, in which young and old are valued, consultative leadership is exercised, and roles are related to gifts rather than gender.

6. Spirituality and economics are inter-connected. In an individualist and consumerist culture and in a world where economic injustice is rife, we are committed to finding ways of living simply, sharing generously and working for justice.

7. Peace is at the heart of the gospel. As followers of Jesus in a divided and violent world we are committed to non-violence and to learning how to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society and between nations, and with the natural world.

Priorities for the network:

1. To develop creative strategies and accessible resources that will enable

Christians from many traditions to learn from and draw on the Anabaptist tradition.

2. To increase the profile of the network so that it can more effectively enable the Anabaptist voice to be heard.

3. To encourage the development and interaction of a network of congregations and church plants that are drawing consciously on the Anabaptist tradition.

(Anabaptist Networks are not unique to Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Networks are emerging elsewhere in the world where Christians are finding a home in the Anabaptist tradition. We recently received the following email from South Korea where an Anabaptist Network is forming.)

Greetings from the land of the Morning Calm in Jesus' name!

I've heard things here and there about the AAANZ and have wanted to make contact with you for some time... Since we're pursuing the development of grassroots Anabaptist networks and relatively near one another in terms of world geography... I thought it would be helpful to compare notes now and then...

It may be that we could have some individuals from the AAANZ visit us if you ever fly through the Seoul area. Granted, the contexts we work in are quite different, but I'd be interested to hear of wisdom (and struggles) you're learning along the way as well as the activities of the Association...

In our situation we have a very loosely connected "network" that consists more of interested individuals in need of more connection to each other. Right now, many of our efforts are in the fledgling phase so it's hard to see what will grow and how it will take shape. Nonetheless, we see the need for and interest in the Anabaptist perspective here.

In addition to people in North America, we've had brief contact with the London Mennonite Center, the Tokyo Anabaptist Center and I hope to get in touch with a couple beginning a type of Anabaptist network in Finland.

We wish you God's nearness, blessing and leading in your ministries there.

Shalom,

Tim Froese

Korea Anabaptist Center, San 28-12 Yonhi-dong Sodaemun-gu Seoul,
Rep. of Korea

E-mail: tkfroese@hanmir.com

BOOKS AND WEB-SITES

“SOUL TSUNAMI ... sink or swim in the new millennium culture” ...

Leonard Sweet (Zondervan, 1999. 446 pages)

There is a saying that goes like this .. ‘there are two things guaranteed in life – death & taxes’. This book would suggest a third – change. And there’s plenty of it!!

Leonard Sweet is the professor of postmodern Christianity at Drew University in America. He suggests that as believers we either understand and respond to the changes in the culture around us or we will become more irrelevant. The term postmodern is used to denote significant changes in society in terms of values, faith choices and behaviours. Sweet states that the enormity of change occurring in our culture is like a tsunami.

How will the church respond to such change? Will we pretend it is not happening? Resist the changes? Or welcome them? If the church is to bear witness to the kingdom we need to embrace the changes around us. Sweet gives ten principles that will equip the followers of Jesus into the future. He discusses everything from the environment, the intense spiritual hunger in society, genetics and the need for the church to become more relevant. Drawing on movies, secular commentators and his own insights Sweet offers a smorgasbord of ways to keep touch with the generation of today.

***Soul Tsunami* is a brilliant book because it captures the soul of our culture, dissects it in easy morsels and then issues various challenges.**

I found it very helpful because I struggle with expressing my faith in a way that penetrates those near me like my neighbours. I also struggle with the widening gap between our rapidly changing society and the church. How do I keep anchored to the Bible and keep in tune with the times? Sweet suggests to keep struggling, keep questioning and become more of a risk taker. I like that!!

I am starting to read his next book called *Aqua Church* which in a similar theme offers guidance to the church in a very fluid culture.

Ross Coleman

Check out these web-sites:

www.jesuit.ie/prayer ,on prayer;

www.signpostmusic.com , about Steve Bell and his music; and

www.textweek.com , helps on the weekly lectionary texts.

SMALL GROUPS THAT CATCH THE WIND:

Using small groups for community and mission in the local church, Edited by Jennifer Turner, Open Book Publishers, Adelaide, 2000

This book has grown out of the work of the Australian Small Groups Network and brings together a collection of material from leading Australian practitioners and participants on the place of small groups in the mission of the church.

The first five chapters explore a number of different models of how churches use small groups and how traditionally structured churches can change their basis of operation. These chapters highlight the commitments and resources that are required to make the different models work.

Chapter 6 explores some theological issues under the heading of “The Quest for Community and the Mandate for Mission” while chapter 7 on the context for mission provides some discussion and case studies of the use of small groups in inner city and rural areas and with young adults.

Chapters 8 and 9 address issues of leadership and developing small group leaders. Chapter 10 addresses practical strategies for implementing small groups while Chapter 11 provides some examples of other specialist groups dealing with intercession, bereavement and inter-generational groups.

While overseas models of small groups in church are referred to the material is predominantly Australian in origin and the detailed examples relate to the Australian context. There are substantial references to more detailed resources for those who wish to follow through on a specific model or theme. This is a helpful resource for churches who want to critically reflect on their life and mission.

Doug Hynd

MENNONITE QUARTERLY REVIEW, October 2000

This particular issue of *MQR* will be of interest to many in the AAANZ. The editor writes:

“More than a year ago, I invited 16 scholars from a variety of

denominational perspectives to reflect on how their theological or ethical understandings have been shaped by an engagement with the Anabaptist tradition...The result of that invitation is the gathering of stories, reflections and critical engagement that follows in this issue.” (501-502)

The authors of the articles include a couple mentioned in Doug’s review of *Coming Home* below - Stuart Murray and Christopher Rowland - and names familiar to *On The Road* readers like Stanley Hauerwas, Glenn Stassen, Richard Hays, Rodney Clapp, and our very own Christopher Marshall. Chris’s article is called “Following Christ Down Under: A New Zealand Perspective on Anabaptism”.

Chris’s account includes the personal as well as the theological. His story could be part of *Coming Home*: After visiting the London Mennonite Fellowship and meeting Alan Kreider, Chris writes:

“To us as strangers in a foreign land, it felt like coming home spiritually.” (524)

This issue can be ordered from the Mennonite Historical Society in Goshen, Indiana, USA. (MQR, Goshen College, Goshen, IN, 46526, USA) Some of the articles can be read on MQR’s website but unfortunately, Chris’s is not one of them. (<http://www.goshen.edu/mqr/>)

MQR is a good source for articles on Mennonite/Anabaptist issues. Two other journals of interest are the *Conrad Grebel Review* from Conrad Grebel University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada (<http://grebel.uwaterloo.ca/cgreview/>) and *Direction*, the journal of North American Mennonite Brethren theological schools (www.directionjournal.org).

MSH

MENNONITE LIFE

(For some interesting reading check out the site listed below. Ted Grimsrud’s article on “Anabaptists and Postmodernity” would be a good one to discuss. What do you think about his view of pacifism? Is his personal experience similar to yours? For more of the papers from the 1998 Bluffton College conference on “Anabaptists and Postmodernity” see *Anabaptists & Postmodernity*, edited by Susan and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, Pandora Press, 2000)

The March 2001 issue of *Mennonite Life* is now available at:

<http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/>

This issue begins our second year of online publication. We welcome your

ongoing interest and participation. Included is an article by Ted Grimsrud on pacifism and postmodernity, presented originally at the “Anabaptists and Postmodernity” conference at Bluffton College in August 1998. Several items relate to the recent novel by Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible*, and Mennonite missions in Africa. Reflections on African mission work by a missionary and missions administrator, Jim Bertsche; two literary reflections on the Kingsolver book; and a set of photographs of Mennonite missions in Congo at about the same time period in which the Kingsolver book is set make up the segment on African experiences. The book review section also includes an African item, a review of the recent book by John and Reinhild Janzen on their recent experiences in Rwanda and Burundi. We also are pleased to make available a cumulative index to the *Mennonite Life* print issues of 1946-1999. This can be found under the Indexes link on our web page.

COMING HOME: Stories of Anabaptists in Britain and Ireland, Edited by Alan Kreider & Stuart Murray Pandora Press/
Herald Press, 2000

Part 1, which occupies the first two thirds of this book, is devoted to a collection of stories from Christians in Britain and Ireland as to how they discovered Anabaptist thinking and how it had affected their lives and thinking. The request that had generated these stories asked people to talk about what books, what ideas and what communities were important to them in their discovery of Anabaptism.

The title for the book emerged out of a common theme in many of the stories – “coming home”. According to the editors “people from an astonishing range of theological and denominational backgrounds felt that in discovering Anabaptism they were finding their home.” (p.12)

Each of the stories is accompanied by a photo so the result is a very personal statement. I must confess that I did not originally plan to read more than a sampling of the stories. Once I started, however, I found myself compelled to keep going and over several evenings worked my way through the forty or so stories. Why did I get so engaged? The closest I can come to an answer is to say that I found it to be an exercise in remembering my own journey and the diversity of influences that have shaped my discipleship. Memories were aroused and emotions engaged as I found elements of my story reflected in the stories recorded there.

The denominational backgrounds of the contributors are diverse. Baptists are strongly represented, so too are Christians from independent fellowships. Anglicans and other Protestant denominations, even the stray Catholic, the Prior of Bolton Abbey in county Kildare. What I found surprising was the strong representation of Christians who had been influenced by the charismatic movement.

The second part of the book includes several essays that are in my judgement an important resource for the Association as it seeks to define its mission within the Australian Christian community and wider culture. These essays place the stories into a wider theological, historical and ecclesiological context.

Chris Rowland, an Anglican priest and Professor of New Testament Exegesis at Oxford University, writes on “The Return of the Anabaptist Voice: Listening to the Stories”. There is nothing patronising in the way this academic seeks to frame a response to the personal stories that provide the core of this book. Two quotes will have to suffice:

“To many, Anabaptism conjures up images of sectarianism and strangeness. For those of us who have been touched by it, it has meant the opening up of horizons and a space for our own discipleship which we never thought possible.” (p145)

“... the themes which emerge again and again in these stories are not narrow and sectarian. Community, peace and, above all the concentration on Jesus are Anabaptist preoccupations which are also universal Christian concerns. Each of these is something to reflect on theologically.” (p145)

Stuart Murray one of the editors writes on “How a Network works: Reflections on the development of the Anabaptist Network in the British Isles”. He provides a history of the Network, some impressions of the sources of its support and appeal and the routes by which it is influencing the Christian community in the British Isles. While the situation in the United Kingdom is very different from that in Australia, the Anabaptist Network is the nearest thing the Association has as a model and there are undoubtedly substantial lessons to be learned from the experience of the Network.

Stuart highlights the importance and potential of networks in a manner which should encourage the Association, though it was written before becoming aware of developments in Australia.

“Networks have been identified as key features of a postmodern society, alternatives to the larger institutions that dominated modernity. Unlike such institutions grass-roots networks do not

require impressive buildings, large amounts of finance or bulky support structures. What do such networks need if they are to develop? What can the experience of the Anabaptist Network in the British Isle offer to those involved in emerging networks elsewhere?

- *Networks depend on friendships and multiple personal links;*
- *Networks need enough events or activities to maintain momentum but not so many as to wear out participants;*
- *Networks require strategies with the ability to envision, organise and facilitate;*
- *Networks take time to develop and those involved will need to be patient;*
- *Networks need to develop various ways of communicating information, vision and values;*
- *Networks can allow people to participate in various ways and at various levels;*
- *Networks need not be exclusive or threatening to other networks or institutions as participants can belong to several networks.” p173-174*

Alan Kreider, whose ministry with his wife Eleanor in the London Mennonite Centre was a significant element in the emergence of the Network, provides a powerful account of “when Anabaptists were last in the British Isles” a historical account of the arrest and trial in 1575 of the members of an Anabaptist church. He attempts to draw out the perceptions of these witnesses and martyrs on a variety of issues and suggests their contemporary relevance. This is a heartrending and powerful piece of historical writing and theological reflection.

There is some unfinished business here for denominations who were established during that period. There is in my view a need to say sorry for the use of state power and violence against fellow Christians for episodes such as this.

The final essay by Noel Moules is on ‘Anabaptism Tomorrow’ a powerful, honest and yet hopeful statement of what the Anabaptist tradition has to offer the church in the British Isles at this particular moment. Again while there are differences of context this essay would repay substantial attention by the Association in charting its future role.

In their introduction the editors highlight a number of questions which they address respectively to Christians in North America and Britain arising out of the stories and reflective essays in the book. There is a self critical note in this collection which bodes well for the future of this movement, for that is what I think it is. There is a willingness to not

only celebrate but also to open the Network up to questioning about its future and deal with the difficult choices which it may well face.

In summary this is a book which is worth reading and discussing. It provides both encouragement and challenge to Christians in Australia and New Zealand both in our individual discipleship and as a community who have found ourselves increasingly “at home” in the Anabaptist tradition and wish to share it with others and more consistently embody it in the Christian community Down Under.

Doug Hynd

***The Word on the Street: Performing the Scriptures in the Urban Context*, by Stanley P. Saunders and Charles L. Campbell, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000.**

The argument about the authority of Scripture particularly in the evangelical church has been largely misdirected and conformed unconsciously to a highly debatable philosophical framework.

The question which needs to be asked is whether we have we got our priorities in the church about the way we approach Scripture massively wrong? Have we focused so extensively and exclusively on the interpretation of Scripture as an intellectual activity when what we should have been concerned with is interpretation as performance of the Scriptures? These difficult and disturbing questions were raised for me as I read and then re-read *The Word on the Street*.

But what does it mean to perform the Scriptures as a form of interpretation? According to Nicholas Lash, the British theologian who to the best of my knowledge coined the phrase, Scripture can be compared to the text of a drama or musical score. Its interpretation is not a matter of academic analysis though it may draw on that work as background. Interpretation requires performance and. “... *the fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of Scripture is the life, activity and organisation of the believing community*”¹.

The authors of *The Word on the Street* are clear on their priorities. It is the interpretation of Scripture as performance, as lived reality, that Stanley Saunders assistant professor of New Testament and Charles

Campbell associate professor of homiletics, both from Columbia Theological Seminary, report on in this passionate and disturbing collection of essays sermons and meditations. More importantly it is not performance in the abstract in a space that could be anywhere and nowhere that Saunders and Campbell are concerned with. Rather it is performance within the context of a particular time, place and social and ecclesial setting, in their case arising out of their involvement in the Open Door Community in downtown Atlanta that is the context of the book.

“The material in this book documents conversion in process – our own. Everything in these essays and sermons arises from our encounters with people who live on the streets of Atlanta, Georgia and our involvement with the Open Door Community, an intentional Christian community modelled after the Catholic Worker Houses...”

While both of us spend most of our hours teaching in Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, each of us has found in the Open Door another vocational home. Over the past four years we have participated in most of the ministries of the Open Door Community. In addition guided by Ed Loring, a founding partner of the Open Door, we have spent hundreds of hours on the streets of Atlanta talking with homeless people, eating with them in soup kitchens, sleeping with them on sidewalks, worshipping with them in public spaces and visiting them in hospitals and jails. We have also team taught seminary courses on the streets with Ed. Chuck and Ed’s course “Good News to the Poor” has given students an opportunity to engage Scripture and practice preaching on the streets, while Stan and Ed’s class “Love Your Enemies: Hospitality and Solidarity in the New Testament and Urban Atlanta” has focused on street based exegesis of the key texts pertaining to our themes”. (pp 6-7)

To assist the reader, one of the early chapters in the book provides an account of the institutions and social spaces mentioned frequently throughout the book, those spaces and places within which the Open Door Community undertakes its ministry and within which the struggle for human lives and imaginations takes place.

Despite the specific North American context many of the forces which shape the lives and experiences of the homeless in this book they are not all that different in many respects from those at work in urban areas within Australia. *Beyond that contextual issue the form of theology reported on and modelled in this work in progress has its own validity and challenge to Australian churches and seminaries.*

So much for the relevance of the book for the readers of this journal, what about the content?

What the authors do from a variety of angles is show us clearly how Scripture can shape the way we see the everyday, “secular” world, in both spiritual and moral terms. From the perspective of the homeless, Christian practices such as baptism, eucharist and preaching take on a new meaning, once the respectable religious veneer of middle class assumptions and familiarity are stripped away. The disabling distinctions that we find hard to let go of such as the body/spirit and sacred/secular divide are both strongly though implicitly challenged.

The material included varies in form and length, with meditations, sermons and essays with intriguing and challenging titles. “A death in the family” for example is a baptism sermon. The contents are grouped under the headings of “Worship”, “Word” , “Solidarity” and Space”. Almost every piece engaged and disturbed me not only intellectually but also at the level of the heart and spirit. If I had to suggest one must read book from the past year this would have to be it.

The writing in these essays has a directness and power arising out of the involvement of the authors with the poor and marginalised on the streets while demonstrating an engagement with both the Scriptures and substantial traditions of theological reflection. In academic terms the influence of their colleague at Columbia Seminary, Walter Brueggeman, who provides the foreword, is direct and obvious. Other clear influences include Walter Wink, William Stringfellow and Stanley Hauerwas.

The six powerful black and white illustrations in this book come from the display of Christina Bray’s exhibit of prints *Street prayers/Spiritual Journeys* and provide strong visual support and reinforcement to this report of engagement between the word and the world.

This book offers a direct challenge to our practice of church discipleship and worship. It is uncomfortable and disturbing but the stories it tells needs our urgent and sustained attention.

Doug Hynd

¹ Nicholas Lash “Performing the Scriptures” in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* SCM Press 1986, p.42

For John Howard Yoder fans, have you visited his homepage?

www.nd.edu/~theo/jhy/

UPCOMING EVENTS

***BAPTISTS TODAY* Conference,**

August 23-26, 2001 Blackfriar's Retreat and Conference Centre, 127 Philip Ave., Watson, ACT. Phone: (02) 6247-8557; Fax: (02) 6247-6892

Naming God:

Is our language a gateway or a barrier to God?

Ecological, feminist, indigenous perspectives

Main Speaker: Dr. Elaine Wainwright RSM Dr. Elaine Wainwright is lecturer in biblical studies and feminist theology in the Brisbane College of Theology and Adjunct Fellow in the School of Theology of Griffith University. Her research has been in feminist readings of the Christian Testament, in particular the gospel of Matthew. Currently she is exploring the genderisation of healing in early Christianity. Her more recent publications include *Shall We Look for Another? A Feminist Rereading of the Matthean Jesus* [Orbis] and the biblical commentary in *The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible, Volume Thirteen: New Testament Women*. She is currently the American Catholic Biblical Association visiting professor at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem.

The titles of her talks are:

- 1. *What's in a Name?***
- 2. *She Who Is ?***
- 3. *Awaiting the One who may come in telling a new story of the universe***

We shall also have a lecture with discussion by Grant Paulson from NITA/Bimbadeen who will speak on the topic: *Naming God: an indigenous perspective.*

We shall also have workshops on different themes.

On Friday night there will be an interactive concert organised by Grant Paulson with the help of Digby Hannah and others.

It will be a great conference. Come and see!

Costs: accommodation and all meals:

Students \$150 (before June 30) and \$170 (after June 30)

Others \$180 (before June 30) \$200 (after June 30)

Part time \$50 day (2 meals) \$25 half day (1 meal) \$10 session

For more information, registration forms etc. contact:

Canberra Baptist Church (PO Box 4055, Kingston, ACT 2604)

Phone: 02 6295 9470 Fax: 02 6295 9682

Email: office@canbap.org.au Website: www.canbap.org.au

THE ANABAPTIST ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Background to the Association

The initiative for the establishment of the Association came out of a meeting in Tasmania in May 1995 of Christians from a variety of denominational backgrounds who had been influenced in a variety of ways by the Anabaptist tradition. To provide a means of building on the contacts established at the meeting the Anabaptist Network of Australia and New Zealand was formed which became the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand following its incorporation in 1998.

Purposes of the Association

The purposes of the Association are:

1. to nurture and support the Christian faith of individuals and groups in Australia and New Zealand who identify with the Anabaptist tradition.
2. to network and link individuals, churches and groups of Christians who share a common Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith.
3. to provide religious services including teaching, training, pastoral care, mediation, and counsel to its members and others interested in the Anabaptist tradition.
4. to provide resources and materials relating to the tradition, perspectives, and teaching of Anabaptists to both the Christian and general public.
5. to convene conferences and gatherings which provide opportunity for worship, teaching, training, consultation, celebration, and prayer in the Anabaptist tradition.
6. to extend the awareness of Anabaptism in Australia and New Zealand assisting individuals, churches and groups discover and express their links with the Anabaptist tradition.
7. to provide an opportunity for affiliation for churches and groups who wish to be known in Australia and New Zealand as Anabaptists.

What is Anabaptism?

Anabaptism is a radical Christian renewal movement that emerged in Europe during the sixteenth-century Reformation. Whilst Anabaptism was a grass roots movement with diverse expressions in its early development, its enduring legacy usually has included the following:

- baptism upon profession of faith
- a view of the church in which membership is voluntary and members are accountable to the Bible and to each other
- a commitment to the way of peace and other teachings of Jesus as a rule for life
- separation of church and state
- worshipping congregations which create authentic community and reach out through vision and service