

**Anabaptist Association of Australia
and New Zealand**

Newsletter

Issue 4

April 1999

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From the Editor's Desk

About this issue

This edition of the Newsletter has a somewhat different flavour to it from the earlier editions. This one really is a Newsletter. It contains some important news on the Association and its plans for the future, including an attachment setting out details of a conference in Wollongong over the coming June long weekend. Please plan to be part of this event and register now.

Conference program

The conference will include sessions on historical perspectives on Anabaptism by Graham Chatfield from Morling College and contributions from Mark and Mary Hurst, who will be visiting Australia, on peacemaking. There will be time for worship, reflection and time for fun together. Full details are included on page 12.

News and people

In what I hope will be only an occasional feature in the future, our good friends Mark and Mary Hurst provide a report on some recent conferences that they have attended in North America. Hopefully in the not too distant future Mark and Mary will be reporting to you in this Newsletter in a different role.

There is the usual Resources & Events feature with notes on books, and periodicals

For those of you who have enjoyed the inclusion of a major article in previous issues and note the absence of such a contribution from this issue, let me plead for your patience. The July edition will include as a bonus feature articles based on material presented at the June conference.

In the mean time, by way of building community I have as a bonus for you three responses from committee members on what the Anabaptist tradition means to them.

What about a title?

After its first year of existence this newsletter does not yet have a title of its own. Suggestions are requested, with the Committee to be the final judge. Here are a couple of suggestions from the editor to get debate going:

From the Margins
On the Road

Editorial thinkpiece - reflections on the church, God and the constitution

A rare late start for work recently found me listening to ruminations on whether or not God should be mentioned in the proposed new preamble to the Australian constitution.

This triggered some reflections not only on that specific issue but also more generally on the place of the Christian community in Australian

society. Have we moved clearly and decisively from the vision and practice of a Christendom model of church and state in which the church piggybacks on the coercive power of the state?

In my estimation christian churches in Australia are still negotiating a transition from the Christendom model with respect to their self understanding of their own character as church and their relationship to the wider society and state framework. This transition is partly conscious, as a result of theological reflection, and driven partly as a practical response to the pressure and reality of social change.

As evidence of the both the progress towards and the ambiguity of the unfinished nature of this transition I would point to evidence derived from my attendance at a couple of inductions of the Anglican clergy recently. I was strongly impressed by the use in the services of the language of shared ministry between the priest and the people. Yet the scope of what is meant by the people in such services was on reflection somewhat ambiguous.

The use of the term appearing in reality to be balanced uneasily between an assumption of a gathered community of committed faithful as in the Anabaptist tradition and a reference to a form of church which implied an accepted and socially assumed role in the wider social structure. In the latter case there was the unspoken implication that you were included in the church community unless you explicitly included yourself out.

The difference in emphasis in the assumption of social importance and role of the church between country and city in this regard was striking. The presence of the mayor on the program in the one case and the total absence of any representative of elected government or community organisation in the other service was a striking testament to the social forces driving this process. But I digress. To return to the issue of being the people of God what does it mean in practice?

What does it mean to be a peaceable community in a world of undergirded by violence? What stake do we as members of such a community have in the apparatus and underlying ideology of the nation state such as Australia?

Should God be in the preamble of the constitution? The real issue for Christians is not the question of "religion" as a private individual belief and the need to keep the private separate from the public. The question revolves around the nature of the God that is referred to in such a preamble. Is the god that is referred to, the god that was used to bless the blood bath of numerous wars this century, the god of nationalism and ethnic cleansing?

Though God remains a mystery that cannot be controlled by our definitions and intellectual analysis we can say something about and indeed must witness to the character of the God we follow. For Christians what we have to say and practice must be conditioned by what we discern about God as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is to say the God we

follow is the God who is identified with the suffering servant who followed the costly path of reconciliation and inclusion of the marginal and the poor. Jesus rejected the use of violence to bring in his kingdom.

Religious faith is fundamental to public life - and we live in a time of intense polytheism rather than atheism. Many gods contend for our loyalty and worship, from the god of consumerism whose temple is the shopping mall, whose priests are the advertising agents, to the agents of salvation by economic policy nature mysticism and/or scientific progress.

For Christians of the Anabaptist tradition the inclusion of reference to God in the constitution should be a matter of some concern. To claim the blessing of the God revealed in Jesus Christ for the coercive power of the state moves is not something that we should support..

The temptation for the church is to accept some vague reference to an undefined God with a vaguely Christian connotation. Such a strategy would do little for the credibility of the christian community. The hard work of discipleship of building a community which lives out a commitment to peacemaking not dependent upon social prestige and coercion lies ahead of us still.

Doug Hynd -Editor

**Making it on the Web -
Third Way Cafe**

An Internet web site where the menu includes current events from a christian perspective and information on Mennonites. www.thirdway.com

Home Church Gathering in 1999
1-4 October
Trinity Christian School, Canberra
For details contact: Ken Goodlet 02 4758 6591 or Jill Crisp 02 62882561

Presidents Page

Welcome to the Easter edition of our Newsletter.

For the past few months as a committee we have been working towards planning the inaugural Incorporated Association Conference for the June long weekend. The details of the Conference are attached to the Newsletter.

The committee has been and are continuing to explore with Mark and Mary Hurst, some of the options that are available to overcome difficulties involved with their visa application and, at the same time, their need to undertake fundraising and to plan in the medium term for their own ministry and development. Progress is being made though always it seems more slowly than we would hope.

We will, in our next newsletter, bring you up to date on the progress of those discussion and hopefully some further news and an indication of a possible timetable.

We are also, as a committee, recognising the need to begin to think more substantially about the vision

and direction of our organisation so that we may develop a more active role in peacebuilding and reconciliation as a ministry. Having now managed to establish an organisational framework the more exciting part of the work can begin.

Unfortunately the Committee was not able to proceed with the workshop in March 1999 with Dr Hizkias Assefa as was announced in the previous newsletter.

In our annual Conference and as a community we will explore these issues further and hopefully make concrete plans about putting them into effect.

I look forward to seeing you at the conference.

Shalom
Colin Isaac

Note on Communication

We try to as a committee to use electronic means of communication and the internet as much as possible to kept in touch with each other. I have enclosed our email addresses to enable you to contact any of us by that means.

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Treasurer's Report

Thank you to all who responded to the appeal for funds in support of the visa application process for Mark and Mary Hurst.

Approximately \$2,500 has been received to date since October 1998. Further donations are still needed to meet the target needed for the solicitor's fees and application fees, which are estimated to be \$4,000 to \$5,000.

Regular donations during 1999 would be very helpful in enabling us to reach this target for the visa process. Those of you who indicated willingness to make regular contributions, could commence making such payments now. This would be very much appreciated and would speed up the legal process. The committee has agreed not to proceed beyond the limits of financial support available at any stage.

The AAANZ bank account is established with the National Australia Bank. The account can be used for periodic transfers. Just contact me for details. Donations made out to the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc (or AAANZ) can be sent to the Treasurer, at PO Box 1514 Armidale NSW 2350 Australia.
Shalom
Gary Baker
(Treasurer)

A Letter From North America

One advantage of being in North America is the many opportunities one has to hear good speakers and attend stimulating seminars and conferences. We have been able to attend several such events in recent weeks and would like to share some reflections with you.

January 8 turned out to be a snowy day, unfit for driving but Eastern Mennonite Missions decided to go ahead with its one-day "Consultation With Miroslav Volf". I braved the dangerous roads and was rewarded with a thought-provoking day. Volf gave two addresses and answered questions from the consultation participants. His first presentation was "The Embrace of The Trinity" and his second was "Reconciliation In Christ".

Miroslav Volf has taught at Fuller Theological Seminary for seven years and has just begun a new position as Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School. He maintains ties to his homeland by serving as visiting professor of systematic theology on the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Osijek, Croatia, his alma mater. He studied at Fuller and the University of Tubigen, where he received his doctoral and postdoctoral degrees under Jurgen Moltmann.

Volf was introduced to Anabaptists in Osijek where Gerald and Sara Wenger Shenk, Mennonites from the USA, studied and taught for a

number of years. He worked to develop a theology that would speak good news into the terrible situation in the former Yugoslavia. His 1996 book *Exclusion & Embrace* (Abingdon Press) is a result of that theological search. Jurgen Moltmann writes on the back cover:

"This book is a major contribution to political theology today. Born out of the suffering of his people in the Balkans, biblically-grounded and future-oriented to a new human community, it is a great witness to the God who forgives and does not remember forever, creating a new community out of enemies. There is no better theology of the present-day context of life and death." Volf spoke about his book and admitted that for some it can be heavy reading at times but a summary of his book can be found in Romans 15:7 "Welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you to the glory of God."

Anabaptism today is enriched by encounters with people like Volf, a Croatian seeking to love his Serbian neighbours. We can learn more about peacemaking and justice as we dialogue with people from other traditions who also take these subjects seriously.

January 16, Mary and I attended "Shalom Conference 1999" whose theme was "Choosing Nonviolence". This is a conference held every two years in Lancaster, Pennsylvania sponsored by area churches. The keynote addresses were given by Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., Senior Minister, The Riverside Church, New York City. This church is sometimes referred to as "the God Box" because it has a key role in the

country as one of the leading Protestant churches. Forbes is an outstanding African American preacher and did not disappoint his audience. His talks covered current U.S. themes like the need for nonviolence, the witness of Martin Luther King, the ongoing problem of racism, and the need to be "following the Spirit into the realm of peace". Forbes is a friend of President Clinton and gave his view on the culture wars going on in this country and the political outworking of this in the current impeachment process.

The conference had a number of workshops where local peace and justice ministries could present their work. A book table full of resources was also present. The man running the book table got up in the one meeting to promote the books he brought along. "The" book he said to get if you bought only one was Dave Andrews' book "Building A Better World". For those who don't know Dave, he's Australian! Mary and I gave a little cheer at that point.

January 18-21 we attended the School For Leadership Training at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia. John Bell of the Iona Community in Scotland was the guest Bible teacher and worship leader. This school is a yearly event mainly for Mennonite pastors in the eastern part of the U.S. and Canada. We returned home renewed and refreshed from the rich times of worship and learning.

John Bell is on an around-the-world trip which includes Australia. We hope many of you get a chance to meet him. The music coming out of

the Iona Community is a rich resource for worship songs that take the Bible's message of peace and justice seriously.

While in Harrisonburg we met with Jerry Holsopple from Mennonite Media. He is the creator of many good video resources and maintains the "Third Way Cafe", Mennonite Media's web site www.thirdway.com. He asked if it would be all right to contact members of the Anabaptist Association to interview you about being Anabaptists Downunder. He wants to use these interviews for their web site. We will be giving him your email addresses so don't be surprised if he contacts you.

In March, Mary will be attending a weekend conference on Spiritual Direction and Mark will be attending one called "Pluralism and Community: Conversations on the Calling and Character of Anabaptist-Mennonites for Beginning the 21st Century". One of the speakers at the latter conference is Rodney Clapp, author of two recent books "The Consuming Passion, Christianity & the Consumer Culture" and *A Peculiar People, The Church As Culture In A Post-Christian Society* (Inter Varsity Press). We hope to continue feasting on the spiritual food being presented here and to find ways to share this feast with you."

Shalom,
Mark & Mary Hurst

Anabaptist Association Gathering

When? 11-14 June 1999

Where?

Wollongong

See Page 12 for details

**The Meaning of
Anabaptism**
**An occasional column of
personal stories &
reflections on the meaning
of the Anabaptist heritage**

John Cox

About ten years ago relatively suddenly, unexpectedly and joyfully, I realised that my primary spiritual identification was with anabaptism. As I have reflected over the past ten years the following are the main influences / events which resulted in this identification.

- I grew up primarily as a Methodist and must have, somehow, caught something of the spirit of early Methodism which had some parallels with anabaptism in doctrine, ethos and lifestyle, spiritual experience and social conscience / concern.
- As a theological student, I had been briefly exposed to anabaptism (albeit pejoratively) when studying Reformation history.
- In the '70's I was influenced by the simple lifestyle movement. One of anabaptism's tenets is living simply.
- In local church life I found that the most fruitful, and even exciting(!), way to study the scriptures is in a small group of believers. Later I discovered the anabaptist principle of the group hermeneutic.
- I was impacted in 1975 by an article on small groups in the church (based on Howard Snyder's *New Wineskins...*). This, in effect, said to me "church is community" - central to anabaptism.
- In 1978 I was released in the Holy Spirit through the ministry of a Charismatic pastor who indelibly etched on my mind the slogan "a church is not a group of special people but a special group of people". The anabaptists were the charismatics of the Reformation who saw the church as a community of the Holy Spirit (perhaps to put it too simply).
- In 1980 I read Robert Banks' *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting*, and have been involved in house churches for most of the time since 1985. When Robert lived in Canberra he, among other things, helped me clarify the relationship of anabaptism to house churches. It was in a home church related context that I first met Mark and Mary.
- I found myself involved in the (re-)baptism debate which rumbled through the Uniting Church during the '80's. What I eventually saw with clarity was that the different "forms" of baptism (so-called "infant and "adult") are reflections of radically different ecclesiologies. Infant baptism is a reflection of a sacerdotal ecclesiology dependent on "priests" and "ordained ministers"; adult baptism (better

called *believers'* baptism) is a reflection of a "believers' church" ecclesiology. In November 1987 I was (re-)baptised ("ana-baptised"!). Before I eventually ceased active involvement in the Uniting Church as a "minister" and member (mid 1988) I (re-)baptised a member of the congregation and declined from then on to "baptise" infants.

- About the mid '80's, as a cultural /learning experience for them, we took our children (now 23 [recently (re-)baptised], 20 [recently baptised] and 18 [yet to be baptised]) to an Anzac Day ceremony at the War Memorial. Having avoided any kind of Anzac Day observance for many years I was shocked and repulsed by the "positive" juxtaposition of God and war. That experience helped me much more to appreciate the anabaptist insistence on the separation of church and state and that God is a God of peace as stated / implied / assumed in the New Testament.

When from about ten years ago I read about anabaptism I found that it answered a whole set of questions - not that the questions I had were necessarily consciously or clearly formulated. They were more often in the form of unresolved, nagging and vaguely identified feelings. The questions concerned, in particular, the nature of the church (ecclesiology), ministry (including "ordination"), the "sacraments", calling and discipleship, and the relationship of church and state.

My perception of anabaptism is that (at its best) it is neither

fundamentalist or liberal; that it is both conservative and radical; and that it holds in a balanced, creative tension aspects of Christian life which all too often are alienated from one another: spiritual experience, ethics (individual and social), community, doctrine and evangelism.

I wouldn't want to leave the impression that I have my anabaptism act all together - far from it! The day to day practice of anabaptism is continuously challenging, if not demanding; at times it all seems too hard! But gently endeavouring to put it into practice is worthwhile and satisfying!

(John Cox is a member of the Committee and lives in Canberra)

Diane Coleman

Let me introduce myself, I am married with two teenage children and I am studying at Morling Theological College in Sydney. My husband (Ross) is the pastor of the Baptist Church at Narellan which we planted 5 years ago.

My first contact with the Anabaptist tradition was through Mark and Mary Hurst who were then involved with my husband (Ross) in Prison Fellowship N.S.W. At the time I was busy studying for a Psychology degree, being a mum, and working part-time as a counsellor. Ross and I became friends with the Hursts and I learned they were Mennonites. I was intrigued to discover who 'Mennonites' were because I knew nothing at all about them nor the Anabaptist faith. Previously to meeting the Hursts I thought perhaps

Mennonites might have been a cult or at least suspect re-their Christian faith. I was to discover how wrong I was as I was confronted by a family (the Hursts) who lived their Christian faith radically. The Hurst family were willing to take Jesus' commands seriously, not only to go out into the world and make disciples, but to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the here and now. They demonstrated the gospel of Jesus showing care and concern for the marginalised of society.

From there began a journey to discover more about Mennonites and the Anabaptist tradition. I discovered the first Anabaptists were called the 'Radical Reformers' of the Reformation. They led a rather precarious existence being persecuted both by the Protestants and Catholics because of their insistence on following the teachings of the bible rather than the rules of society or the church.

I am still on my journey of discovery, currently I am now the secretary for AAANZ and feel excited and challenged by what I read of Anabaptists around the world. Issues of social justice, compassion for the poor and marginalised, reconciliation and peacemaking have found expression in my faith for many years. I have found it refreshing to be involved with Christians who are willing to take these issues seriously and are willing to have a prophetic voice both to Christian and secular society.

I am looking forward to the June conference so that I can connect at a deeper level with others who are also interested in both exploring the

Anabaptist faith and living out Jesus' kingdom values today.

(Diane Coleman is Secretary of the Association)

? Anabaptism and Colin Isaac ? Who, How and Why?

I live with my wife, Ann and three children, Peta (15), Stephanie (14) and Sara (13) at Wamberal on the Central Coast which is approximately one hour's drive north from Sydney.

As a young child I lived with my family in Belfield, an inner western suburb of Sydney. During my adolescence I attended an Anglican Youth Group, accepted the Christian faith and was baptised and confirmed at the age of fourteen. At the age of seventeen I left home, joined the Air Force and became associated with Baptist churches in Melbourne. I continued to worship in Baptist churches in Melbourne and Sydney during my Air Force career and was baptised at Punchbowl Baptist church at the age of 21. In my mid-twenties I attended Monash University and completed a combined Economics/Law Degree and practised law whilst continuing to worship in Baptist churches in Victoria up until 1991.

In 1991 I commenced study and attended Morling Theological College in Sydney. During my time at Morling College I completed training in Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution. It was through

this training that I gained awareness of the Anabaptist tradition.

I initially met Mark and Mary Hurst during their ministry in Sydney. Mark and Mary have encouraged me in my learning of the Anabaptist traditions of discipleship, community and peacemaking.

In 1996 I travelled to the US and Canada to attend courses sponsored by the Mennonites.

Whilst attending these courses I gained a much deeper and more meaningful appreciation of the Anabaptist tradition of peacemaking.

Since then, the workshops I have attended and my reflections on such learning has deepened my faith. My continued learning challenges me to relate Christ's message of peace and goodwill to all people in a new and innovative way.

We live in a world where conflict, division and injustice is rife. Our world cries out for the message of reconciliation through peace and justice which is made possible through the teachings of the gospel.

Resources & Events

Global Gods: Exploring the Role of Religions in Modern Societies
by David W Shenk Herald Press
1995

Offers a fresh approach to comparative religions exploring in addition the tensions between religions and modernity.

Beyond our Prayers by Nathan B Hege Herald Press, 1998

The story of the Meseret Jristos Church in Ethiopia from 1948 to 1997.

God's Week has Seven Days: Monday Musings for Marketplace Christians by Wally Kroeker Herald Press

52 short weekly musings for everyone with work to do , showing the common threads that link our jobs and our faith.

A Mennonite Statement and Study on Violence
Herald Press

This book integrates the violence statement adopted in 1997 by the Mennonite church and the Mennonite General conference church with a six session study guide written by Lois Barrett, an extensive bibliography, and personal stories of encounters and responses to violence.

For Further information contact
Herald Press 616 Walnut Avenue
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1999 USA or www.mph.org

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