ON THE ROAD

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Community

is the centre of our life

Contents

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From the editor

Nathan Hobby

This is an issue of farewells. We farewell long time member Bessie Pereira, who died in December. I give an obituary on p. 5 before an account from Bessie herself of her experience as a woman in ministry on p. 6.

We also farewell from the role our president of seven years, Doug Sewell. At the AGM late last year, we recorded a note of appreciation for Doug.

The members of AAANZ express their gratitude for Doug Sewell's seven years of presidency. We particularly acknowledge these qualities and achievements:

- *Fresh thinking, with initiatives like Groundbreakers which has been building local expressions of Anabaptism around Australia and New Zealand.*
- *Commitment to expanding the network, which has helped grow the number of members considerably.*
- *Servant leadership, leading with humility, diligence and attention to detail.*
- *Embodying Anabaptism in his commitment to peacemaking and inclusivity.*

We thank Doug for his service and look forward to continue journeying with him as a vital part of the network.

Doug's report on his years in the job capture something of what's happened and the challenges ahead. We welcome our new president, John McKinnon.

The theme of this issue is the second in a series of three covering the essentials of Anabaptism, the three parts of the AAANZ Vision statement:

- Jesus is the centre of our Faith
- Community is the centre of our Life
- Reconciliation is the centre of our Work

Bessie and Doug have both, in different ways, been pushing AAANZ toward embodying community better over the years.

The contributions around the theme of community have a refreshing range of genres—a column from Mark and Mary; an article on communal discernment by David Griffin; a song by Dave Andrews; and a review by Mark Hurst.

The view from Ephesians 4

'To prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service'

"Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will learn to think about our community and pray and hope for it." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

I (Mark) just read a new book called *Bonhoeffer The Assassin? – Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking*, by Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony Siegrist, and Daniel Umbel (Baker Academic, 2013). It is an interesting book arguing that Bonhoeffer was consistently pacifist in his life and did not take part in any plots to kill Hitler. I'm sure it will stir up controversy among Bonhoeffer scholars.

While reading the book I was reminded how important two of Bonhoeffer's books were to my own spiritual formation. *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* were books I read during my university days. They both had a profound affect on me leading to a lifelong interest in peacemaking and a desire to live in Christian community.

Over the years Mary and I have lived in a number of intentional Christian communities and have visited others around the world. The opening words of Psalm 133 inspire us – "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" But we would add words of our own – "How difficult it is to live in community in an individualistic society."

For the past six years we lived with others in northern Sydney as the "1643 Community". Our original vision statement included the following:

"The 1643 Community intends to be an Anabaptist incarnational presence in the Northern beaches area of Sydney. Some of the goals of the community are:

- Be a place of hospitality by hosting individuals and small groups
- Be a place of peace by modeling peaceable relationships
- Be a place of spirituality by having regular times of worship and prayer
- Be a place of learning by hosting workshops and seminars
- Be a place of resources by sharing books and audio-visual material"

We hosted many individuals and groups for meals, small group meetings and overnight (and extended) times of hospitality at our 1643 home. Over the years we shared the property with around fifteen other residents. Due to difficulties with the local council (a long story) the community has come to an end. We are left with questions about why things have turned out the way they have. Our commitment to living in community remains and we look forward to where God leads us in the future.

Models of community living are needed to challenge all of us to resist the individualistic messages that bombard us each day. Bonhoeffer knew how tough Christian community is but also how necessary for our spiritual formation.

> Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... Each by itself has profound perils and pitfalls. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair.
> – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

President's report

John McKinnon, AAANZ President

I am writing this report sitting in Singapore airport, waiting for my connecting flight to Phnom Penh. I am on a journey, a long flight from Sydney just completed, the rest ahead of me, on a different plane, with different crew.

I am writing this report sitting in Singapore airport, waiting for my connecting flight to Phnom Penh. I am on a journey, a long flight from Sydney just completed, the rest ahead of me, on a different plane, with different crew. Similarly, AAANZ is on a journey. It has just completed seven years with Doug Sewell as president. Over that time, Doug has been a committed, skilful pilot of the AAANZ plane. As he finishes his "sector", we thank him with all our hearts for his service and pray his sabbatical rest is fruitful and reinvigorating.

In case you were wondering, my role with AAANZ is not to pilot it to the next destination. I see myself managing the transit lounge. My role is transitionary, hopefully ending in a year when we welcome a new younger, more diverse group of people to take AAANZ onward and upward.

Enough of the indulgent analogies. I first came across (modern) Anabaptism in around 2000 when I met Mark and Mary Hurst at a seminar run by Bessie Pereira* on house churches. I instantly recognised my spiritual home: a Christianity centred on Jesus (that is, his life, teachings and example, not just his death), a desire for community and an ethic of reconciliation.

Over the years since I have come to see why the Anabaptists were called the radicals of the reformation. A look at Jesus' life and teaching leads us to radical notions of economic re-distribution, radical inclusiveness and radical re-definitions of power. The Hursts, along with many other wonderful people in the AAANZ network, have embodied these ideas and I am so blessed to have benefited from their examples and teaching. However, I wonder whether the organisational aspect of AAANZ has similarly embodied a Jesus centred life.

I am embarrassed by the very title of "president"; does it fit with such a group? The executive committee remains composed of men, white men, all requiring an "L" when they write their age in Roman numerals. I certainly do not mean to criticise any of the past leadership here. I just point out that perhaps the future should look different.

What would the governance of a radical, Jesus-centred, community-focused, reconciliation-seeking association look like? I suggest that at the very least it would be diverse, across age, gender and ethnicity. It would challenge traditional models of hierarchy, exploring collaborative and consultative and empowering decision making.

Of course, all this begs the bigger question: what role can the AAANZ, this formal association of people across two countries, play in supporting, promoting and embodying such a faith? How does a geographically disparate group practice radical community? I have an inkling that hospitality may play a part but these are big questions for the future and the future leadership. I think to start this discussion we need to involve that Jesus centred leadership I mentioned above.

So, the task in the year ahead is such a transition. I welcome all who share this vision of a Jesus centred faith supported by AAANZ, to join in our conversation. There will be opportunities to meet together physically and also to join in other forums. The aim is that by the AGM in November 2014, we have a new younger, more diverse leadership team to pilot this plane to its next destination.

*I'm sure this is one of the least of the ways that Bessie influenced our lives and our movement. Bessie was dearly loved by many AAANZ members and many can recall the significant influence she had on their lives. We are thankful for the time and effort she contributed. Most of all we are thankful that we got to share our lives with this wonderful person.

Seven years can be a long time on the road

President's Report 2007 to 2013

Doug Sewell

A lot can happen in just seven years. It was in 2007 that Steve Jobs introduced the first iPhone, the Doomsday Clock was set to five minutes to midnight in response to North Korea nuclear testing and in Sydney 2.2 million people took part in the first Earth Hour.

Looking back can bring insight whereas looking forward is difficult, particularly in a world of rapid technological change, increasing globalization and social alienation coupled with a cultural conservatism and religious doggedness that resist change.

Doug Sewell (right) with visiting speaker Michael Hardin in 2012

When I took on the role of president of AAANZ in 2007 at the Anabaptist Conference held at Pinjarra, Western Australia, I had no clear idea what the future would bring. My desire was to see what I perceived to be an emerging movement in Australia and New Zealand take form and shape as a network of diverse groups and people to become a more indigenous and relevant Anabaptist voice. Anabaptism, which had strong European and American roots, I felt was largely unheard of downunder and needed an authentic local expression. Our vision was for a Jesus centered way of living as linked communities focused on reconciliation. But this would not come easily. I wrote later in 2007: "We have seen remarkable progress for the network despite the challenges of building a network across such a vast far-flung geography. Both Australia and NZ suffer a tyranny of distance that engenders a sense of isolation. A network can strengthen isolated individuals but also suffers an inherent weakness in its inability to link up people in real relationships."

I will step down as president at the end of this year and as I reflect on my time there are many things I can now see more clearly. I saw the difficulty our network faced of articulating and communicating as a simple story what Anabaptism could bring to the table. The ABC Radio National Encounters program The Anabaptist Vision helped convey some of that story to the public. There are many other Christian groups on a similar journey and AAANZ wanted to partner alongside them; groups like Passionfest, Urban Vision, OIKOS, Urban Seed, Praxis, TEAR, Surrender, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Pace e Bene, Irene's Place, 1643 Community, Community of the

2012 AAANZ Executive gathering in Sydney

Transfiguration, Jahworks and Urban Neighbours of Hope and also recognising the important place in our history of Peace Tree and the Perth Anabaptist Fellowship.

To grow a sustainable movement has been slow. The membership has crept up from about 45 in 2007 to over 150 today, though membership can mean many different things. Developing a sense of ownership of the movement has been hard. A few do most of the work and carry the financial load for the Association. Yet many are very committed in other ways to what they are already doing individually as theologians exploring new faith paradigms or as peace activists taking up their own cross in challenging settings. To those members I believe the Association has added extra value and connectedness to their work and life. Over the years I have been inspired by the commitment of so many within the network to live out the core convictions of being a peace church tradition, to humbly listen to other peoples' stories and engage with the grassroots.

AAANZ has brought us into contact with some remarkable people who we have listened to at conferences and through tele-conversations; people like Tom Sine, David Augsburger, Ron Sider, Angie O'Gorman, Stuart Murray Williams, Michael Hardin and Wes Howard Brooks. And powerful stories by others within our own wider community at conferences on New Monasticism and Anabaptism, At the Edge of Empire, and From Pieces to Peace.

Nathan Hobby, author and Anabaptist in Perth, has produced our publication On the Road and created a journal with a mix of depth and readability with punchy articles that now reach around the world. Our Groundbreakers in various locations continue to dig away to encourage regional activities across Australia and New Zealand and build awareness of Anabaptism.

And through all this time I want to pay tribute to the enormous effort made by Mark and Mary Hurst who have continued to give so much personally to enliven our lives, inform our stories and share their journey with us.

I look forward to seeing what the next seven years may bring in our journey together as a movement and emergent network of God's making. Thank you all.

Bessie Pereira, 1941-2013

Nathan Hobby

Bessie Pereira (left) with Mary Hurst

The Anabaptist Association lost a key member when Bessie Pereira died on 8 December 2013. Bessie was the founder of Oikos Ministries, a network encouraging, connecting and promoting house churches across Australia. She was on the AAANZ executive for many years. One of her contributions to AAANZ I most appreciated was her role in organising the very successful 2009 AAANZ Conference on the theme of New Monasticism. It was a vibrant gathering of a diverse range of people and a high point in AAANZ history for me.

I got to know Bessie in the days of our house church, Perth Anabaptist Fellowship. She was a real encouragement in her visits to us. I remember her great emphasis on the 'one anothers' of the Bible—a list of every verse of the Bible containing an instruction about how to treat one another. She was less interested in theological debate and far more interested in making sure we loved one another as a church. In 2006, my wife Nicole and I were privileged to be married by her.

Bessie had a gift for finding common ground with a wide range of Christians—Anabaptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, New Monastics. What mattered to her was being church in a relational, non-hierarchical way. She was passionately opposed to the conventional way of being church where the congregation are almost an audience. She came to this position after a significant ministry in the Anglican church, as described by her in the pages which follow.

She built Oikos from scratch into an organisation which outlives her and will carry on her work under the leadership of Phil Brown. She did this through her gift for relating to people, her ministry of encouragement, her organisational skills, and her optimism. In her last weeks, she posted on Facebook that she had finished writing a book; when it's published it should be another way her legacy lives on.

Bessie had great spirit. She was focused on the kingdom through years of living with cancer. She didn't let it break her or stop her ministry. Her priority was with the task she believed God had for her.

For AAANZ, Bessie was an important corrective. While many in our organisation are drawn by the Anabaptist legacy of peace, Bessie was there to remind us that an equally important part of the Anabaptist legacy is that of reimagining church. She was practical, when sometimes our organisation tends to the theoretical.

Our thoughts and prayers are with her husband Kendrick, her children and grandchildren.

My story

Bessie Pereira

Back in Issue 51 of On The Road (December 2011), Bessie shared this account of her experience of being a woman in ministry. I thought it worth reprinting as a tribute to her life and work.

There I was, in the pulpit in my grey deaconess uniform – and wearing a blue veil! This was in the early sixties and I was a new student training for ordination in the Anglican Church, and head covering was the required dress for deaconesses in those days. After that service the Vicar told me I looked like the Blessed Virgin Mary and even some in the congregation commented on my appearance being like to that of a nun. How embarrassing was that! And so from then on I refused to wear the veil. That was probably my first 'gender fight'.

Having dealt with the 'veil' decisively, the more difficult issue for me was the fact that although male ordinands were fully supported by the Diocese, female ordinands were not and I had to work part time to pay my way through Ridley College training. The strange thing was that I considered this to be normal and never challenged it, even in my own mind. While the men only had 'Sunday duties', I was assigned a parish appointment which required me to be on deck two afternoons, an evening and a Sunday with regular preaching, youth and Sunday School work, visiting (on a push bike called 'Ruby') and be involved with all the rest of the rough and tumble of parish life – and still do full time studies at Ridley! On top of that, I earned personal pocket money by house cleaning on a Friday afternoon and as a ward assistant at Fairfield Hospital during holidays. I considered myself blessed to be given assistance via bursaries for books and uniform. Ah! The old days! I look back and wonder how I did it all.

My second parish was very different to the first. I was not permitted to take any part in a Sunday service. My role was strictly with women and children plus a mixed youth group of which the curate and I shared leadership. Again, I accepted this, but was frustrated after the wider role I had in my first parish experience. This being recognised as the toughest area in Melbourne at the time, I was kept busy. It had been the area chosen for the relocation of slums from inner Melbourne in time for the Olympics in 1956. Somewhat better houses,

but the problems remained the same. A lot of family breakdown, poverty and depression. As well as the usual parish duties, much of my work would have been better served by a social worker, but the church was all there was at the time. I became a probation officer to women and girls also. I think the seeds of Anabaptism were sown in me in those years.

It was in the late sixties and after ordination as deaconess that my experience of parish life broadened out with a move to the other side of Melbourne. I had more of a teaching role and even had a men's group at one stage. A woman teaching men? However, I still had no prospects of ever being in an independent role in parish ministry, but would always be working under the exclusive authority of the (male of course) vicar. This I must say to my present amazement, I considered normal at the time! Everything to do with gender roles in the ministry in the Anglican Church seemed set in concrete. And so I just got on with the job but used every opportunity to push the boundaries in order to be involved on every level of ministry to the extent that I was permitted.

The eighties saw radical change through the efforts of such groups as the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW). Most of this happened around me rather than my being directly involved on the battle front. I got on with what I was doing on ground level in the parish but was regularly called to meetings held by MOW or Archbishop Penman. When it became 'church law' that women were to be included in the three-fold ministry of the Anglican Church, I was sent a letter (which of course I still have in my possession) by the Archbishop, inviting me to a service for the making of deacons. In my letter of acceptance I couldn't help but comment to the archbishop that my having been a deaconess for nearly two decades and now being allowed to become a 'deacon' seemed something more akin to a sex change than changing anything as to what I do or my place in the hierarchy of the church. He saw my point! I realised of course that this was just a stepping stone towards full priesthood which would change the role of women eventually.

The first ordination of women at St Paul's Cathedral was one of great excitement and made the news on TV and the press. However, when we were all ready to move into the Cathedral, we were all bundled out due to a bomb scare! The police went through the Cathedral with sniffer dogs before we were allowed to proceed. Feelings ran high over the issue of allowing women to take full part in the three-fold ministry of the church. To this day, there are dioceses and parishes that refuse to allow women to minister.

My experience in my last parish in the late eighties was a period of turmoil around me and within. On the one hand I was made associate minister of the parish, but many clergy and lay people were not ready to deal with the leap into gender equality in the church and I was often caught betwixt and between! Remember of course, that this was a period in my life when I should have been at the peak of my calling (career). Just a couple of scenarios might explain my situation.

We had a change of vicar and in the interregnum between vicars, a locum priest had the task of preparing the parish for change and then to prepare the service of induction of the new priest. I was omitted from having any part in the service or to even sit with the clergy attending – even those from other churches in the district (and, incidentally, I was the president of the local Ministers' Association). I remonstrated with the locum about this and reminded him that perhaps as associate minister I might need to be included in some way. He saw my point and actually he later became very significant in my future ministry in many positive ways and is still a dear friend. We laugh about that situation.

It was the first parish for the new vicar and because it seemed rather ironic after all my years of experience in parish ministry that I work 'under' the new vicar's authority, the bishop encouraged my role as a more independent one in the second centre of the parish. After having been left on their own to make do with occasional involvement by the vicar or myself and lay preachers, a small number of parishioners did not want me in charge of their church. They made life very difficult for me.

During this time over the 'women issue' in the church, I began to question the ordination of anybody. I felt that my biggest difficulty was not being a woman in the church, but rather with the hierarchical system that not only placed women in a subordinate position, but also 'lay' people. I began to see the clergy/lay divide as being unbiblical and in fact damaging to the church. Over the years I had seen many damaging political situations occur in the church that had to do with the way we 'do church'. My reading of early church history and devouring Robert Banks' books which the locum priest had lent me before he moved on from the parish with the arrival of the new vicar, convinced me that church had to be different.

So having been, in a sense, 'primed' to be the first woman vicar in the Melbourne Diocese, I stepped out of the church altogether. In 1989 I poured my heart out to the Bishop and was released from my licence in the diocese on the basis that I could return any time in the future if I so wished. Since then, I have been involved in home churches and the OIKOS Australia ministry has grown keeping pace with the growth of the new ways of being church. I spoke recently with a bishop who had been my 'boss' in my second parish all that time ago, and told him that I feel that I am now at the peak of my ministry and that Australia is my parish! Incidentally, all my contemporaries in the ministry of the church are retired or dead.

Of course, the house church movement isn't devoid of the 'gender problem'. I was challenged recently at a seminar where I was one of the keynote speakers, as to why, when the Bible says that women shouldn't teach men, was I doing just that? Sometimes I receive calls for help from home churches when women's leadership is questioned. I point them in the direction of biblical passages to do with Pricilla and Aquila, described by Paul as 'co-workers' and that Priscilla is often mentioned first (e.g. Romans 16:3). They were house church leaders. Junia and Andronicus, wife/husband or sister/brother were greeted by Paul as 'outstanding among the apostles' (Romans 16:7). Junia was unlikely to be the only woman apostle. Some women were prophetesses, surely a more 'dangerous' gift than teaching (Acts 21:9)! Others were described as 'women who worked hard for the Lord' (Romans 16:12), co-strugglers (Phil 4:2-3). And so one could go on. I think the most compelling argument is that Jesus never put any restrictions on the ministry of women. His life and ministry were surrounded by them. I often point house churches to such books as *What's With Paul and Women?* by Jon Zens (Ecclesia Press) and *A Woman's Place. House Churches in Earliest Christianity* by Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald (Fortress Press), among others.

It is important to see women's and men's roles alongside one another. It just simply doesn't make sense that God would give gifts liberally to women and then for them to be chained to a pew with head covering and gagged! I have lived through the transition period and we are still seeing the dregs of difficulty for women to be released in the church, but it has to come. God is moving in amazing ways in releasing his church missionally across the globe and the 'women issue' will be swallowed up in the thrust outwards as we see the church moving out of the building to be amongst the marginalised and hurting in the way Jesus was. As we become kingdom rather than 'church' focused and get back to what Jesus really said and did, we will see women and men together take on the tasks ahead seamlessly.

I look back with deep gratitude to God for all the training and experience I gained over the decades I worked in the Anglican Church. In God's economy, every bit counts – the good and the difficult – and all this has given me the skills needed for the task I now have in hand. I see a different experience in the church for the women coming forward for ordination today, but I am aware that they, too, have some of the same struggles I had all that time ago. I could never go back. I have been released.

Most Dearly

Dave Andrews

D D- A7
In our heart of *hearts*
D A-A7
We *hold* the hope most *dearly;*
D G D
We *hold* the hope most *dearly* for *humanity:*
Bm7
That *we* will come to see
D G
The *love* that we all feel become so real
D G A
We'll be *community* like the *holy trinity*.

D D-A7
And every now and then
D A-A7
We *glimpse* the fragile *beauty*,
D G D
We *glimpse* the fragile *beau-ty* of our *unity*:
Bm7
And *some*times we can see
D G
The *love* that we all feel become so real
D G A
We're like a *family* speaking *smiles* and kissing *tears*.

G A
Thru' the dark nights of *prayer*,
G A
And hard days of *care*.
G A D
We pit our *hope* a*gainst* des*pair*.

Bm7
And *some*times we can see
D G
The love that we all feel become so real
D G A
We're like a *family* speaking *smiles* and kissing *tears*.

G A
Thru' the dark nights of *prayer*,
G A
And hard days of *care*.
G A (G)D
We pit our *hope* a*gainst* des*pair*.

Free mp3 - www.daveandrews.com.au/songs/Songs_of_Joy_and_Sorrow/15_Most_dearly.mp3

Communal discernment

David Griffin

'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.'

- 1 Cor. 14:29

The process of corporate decision making is often a fraught task. Committees certainly possess their own tedium quotient, as do congregational meetings: pathologies are not confined to individuals.

Some Roman Catholics have argued that congregationalism is little more than a motherhood term. In place of an ordained priest, such churches are really lead by the loudest layman. Communal discernment is, in reality, an excruciating tug of loyalties between a clerical and non-clerical voice, a contest between the two big bulls in the paddock.

So what is communal discernment? What is trying to be discerned? Who leads the discernment process, and who is actually doing the discerning? What is the final outcome of the process? Perhaps bad examples are easier to cite than good ones. I recall a leader painfully steering a discussion towards a pre-determined but hidden outcome. This was communal manipulation. But I also recall a frustrated discussion immediately being resolved by a retired electrician's simple suggestion. This was likely a prophetic word, discerned as such (1 Cor. 14:29).

Communal Discernment and the Spirit

Communal discernment describes a process. As such, it is not an end in itself. It may discern badly, come to a wrong conclusion, or bring about peace based upon a lie. A group may happily and unanimously adopt unethical policies. Of greater significance than the process of discernment is the rightness of the decision or outcome. Better a good and right outcome without my involvement than a wrong or bad decision with it. Small groups in particular confront the temptation of identifying healthy communal discernment with the full involvement and emotional satisfaction of its members, where process trumps outcome.

Christian communal discernment is that process of making a decision where it can be written, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," (Acts 15:25, 28). But who is "the us" – just the leaders, those making the decision, or all the people affected by the decision? And does this "us" have to be the same in every instance? What is clear is that the "us" of Acts 15 believed that they were acting in congruence with the Holy Spirit. Yet this decision applied to others who were not involved in the decision making process at all. Not only were they not present, it was a decision by Jews concerning Gentiles, who at best were represented by Paul and Barnabas.

On the other hand, Acts 6:1ff shows the Palestinian Jewish apostles handing over a decision to the whole body of Hellenistic Jews, which in turn elected seven men of Hellenistic background. As a result, the word of God spread (v. 7), implying that the decision was "good to the Holy Spirit."

I recall reading a defence of congregationalism which described the transcript of a church minute book as a record of the Holy Spirit's will for the church. And here I was thinking that ecclesial infallibility was limited to the pope speaking *ex cathedra*! Is the Spirit really interested in chair acquisition, building maintenance and budgets? Or should the meeting concern itself only with major matters that directly affect its spiritual and moral life? For a radical group, can discussion and decision about a military protest be "good to the Holy Spirit" and not just the "us"? And does this extend to the choice of base, and the form of protest?

Pastors know how readily Christians dress up their opinions as God's will for the church. What is a good to an "us", or more likely a "me", is objectified being good to the Spirit. This turns disagreement into spiritual disobedience. But such an apparent prophetic insight is more likely the opinion of the strong willed, the cultist, or the person with a personality disorder (usually OCD, presenting as a theological or moral passion).

Communally discerning at the intersection

A prophet brings God's unchanging word into a new and changed situation. "Jerusalem will stand" was true on Isaiah's lips, but false in Jeremiah's time. Isaiah stood in the Davidic/Zion traditions of God's covenant faithfulness, whereas Jeremiah stood in the Sinai tradition of judgment upon Israel's unfaithfulness. By not standing in the Lord's counsel (Jer. 23:16-22), the

false prophets wrongly interpreted the cultural situation (v.16f). And by heeding their words, the community was lead to destruction. Words from our own heads, rather than the Lord (v. 16f) tend to have that outcome.

Thus Paul urges a process of communal discernment of prophetic words (1 Cor. 14:29). The individual who dares to speak for God must be weighed because it is so easy for tribal identity, or outrage against a perceived enemy, to be dressed up as prophecy.

Communal discernment is the process of determining God's way for life. It is not trying to make a decision or develop a policy that satisfies everyone, or which will enhance a group's public status. God's way, in Anabaptist thought, is inscripturated, and bears witness to Jesus Christ. *The community is seeking to discern in the complexity of life how to bear truthful, loving and peaceful witness to Jesus Christ.* It follows the prophet, "Look the Lamb of God" (Jn. 1:29). We are disciples of the person of Jesus, not apologists for an ethical ideal. We are not trying to discern the correct application of a moral principle such as justice or holiness. We are not trying to out-cool the world in moral broadmindedness (1Cor. 5:1).

Sometimes following Jesus will mean reaffirming a long held position in a new circumstance: the church holds its ground against strong cultural pressure to abandon the tradition. It reaffirms the threefold sense of tradition (*paradosis*) - theological convictions, moral beliefs, and church practice - in Paul. Here communal discernment perceives in contemporary cultural consciousness, moods and movements the work of the principalities and powers. These can be identified in the story of Jesus' temptations. As such, they are seductively attractive: they satisfy basic human drives in immoral ways, promise social or political power, or guarantee social acceptance and fame, which is an appeal to hubris, the primal satanic sin. Eros, power and mammon, or the world, the flesh and the Devil, come in variegated forms of deceptive beauty.

But tradition is not antiquarianism. New paths must be followed (Hebrews 11), but they always lead to the Christ we confess, for a mangled Christ is no Christ at all. The new path is required by faithfulness to the tradition. We are pilgrims moving to a kingdom better than the current ones. The destination is what matters. The journey is secondary, because the blissful drift in the canoe under a gorgeous blue sky may lead to a deadly spiritual Niagara.

Of all groups, Anabaptists should be most aware that pilgrim discipleship rarely conquers cultures: sometimes it may get us sawn in two (Heb. 11:33, 37). To walk in 'all God's ways', (Dt. 10:12) means staying within christological moral limits. The moral arguments of proportionalism or consequentialism – moral reasoning framed around calculated outcomes – are not finally authoritative. Such reasoning is common in ethics where the principle of social responsibility takes priority. Such responsibility necessitates a degree of courting and being courted by the dominant cultural *mythos*. This sits uneasily with Anabaptism's focus on Jesus' faithfulness to God as the model for human life. When push comes to shove (perhaps rarely), social *responsibility* is limited by Christian *faithfulness*. Even though faithfulness may lead to isolation, responsibility brings the greater danger of abandoning Christ. Better is Christian faithfulness in a cave (Hb. 11:37f) than unfaithfulness on the streets.

Consequently, the most important moral disposition and practice required for discerning the Spirit is faithful obedience to Christ. The Spirit bears witness to Jesus (Jn. 14:25), and includes obedience to his commands (Jn. 14:15ff). Warm love means glad obedience (1 Jn. 5:3). Communal decisions which deviate from Christ and his commands, even if accompanied by joy and unanimity, are not good to the Spirit.

Communal discernment in practice

So how do we go about discerning "what is good to the Holy Spirit"? I suggest that there is no single process that is universally appropriate in every circumstance. A democratic process is inappropriate in a critical spiritual situation. A year of listening may be spent listening to alien voices. Spirit-inspired leadership may mask bullying.

What about a group that cannot decide? A demand for unanimity easily degrades into spiritual pathology ("Why can't *I* understand God's will like the rest?"), corporate bullying of the lone voice, or a strong voice holding the group hostage by demanding favours in exchange for agreement. A better way is for the community to agree to delegate such a decision to a small group on the basis that whatever the decision, the whole group will support it. This is similar to my pastoral practice of admitting people into church membership. A simple question is asked: "How will you respond when the church makes a decision with which you disagree?" If they cannot accept such a decision, I suggest they are not ready to join. The moral skill and ability to accept defeat is fundamental to communal discernment, although this in itself begs the question about the moral and theological integrity of the church's decision. But in my experience, such matters are rare, perhaps because I have served in churches which tend to take the Bible seriously.

Communal discernment often has problems with leadership. Congregational churches are rarely innovative due to the innate conservatism of groups over against individuals. Leaders however should be

given the opportunity to explain their ideas, and discussion should proceed without either defensiveness by, or attacks on, the leader. Leaders ought to take the responsibility to lay openly before the church what they believe is right for its life, and the church should acknowledge its leader's privileges in this area. Leaders should not be bad negotiators by holding back part of their thoughts, but outline their plans clearly and wholly. Incremental disclosure of plans is often the strategy of scoundrels, because it obfuscates the final goal, and is manipulative. All can be said, but only if it is said in gentle love and kindness, to build up. Discerning the Spirit demands the moral practices of his fruit (Gal. 5:22f). Leaders themselves ought to be ready to accept defeat, and if defeat occurs regularly, acknowledge that it may be time to reassess their position.

Leaders should not have to work under threat. Servant leadership, much touted, is not the whole story: Paul acknowledges power to both build up and pull down (2 Cor. 13:10). The anti-clericalism of some (ana) baptists can be as pathological as high Tory clericalism. The old bad hierarchies may be replaced by harsh new ones. Servanthood describes Christlikeness, and Jesus was no walk over. He decided when to lay down his life: no - one took it from him. We confess that the Lord is the Servant, but the Servant is also the Lord.

A calculus for communal discernment?

So how can we gauge if communal discernment (1 Cor. 14:29) gets it right? Perhaps the two texts from Acts may help. In Acts 6:7 the Word spread. In Acts 15:31 the Gentiles were filled with joy, encouraged and strengthened. Here are two criteria to help assess whether what has been discerned is good to the Spirit: the Gospel spreads (outside the church), and the believers are glad in a Gospel sort of way (inside the church). Can these texts enable the development of a process of communal discernment so that decisions are not just good to us, but more importantly, good to the Holy Spirit?

Attending the church of St Martin, soldier for Christ

Nathan Hobby

Last Easter, I began attending St Martin in the Fields, a local Anglican church. As an Anabaptist, it raises a lot of theological questions for me, not least of which is the church's military connections. A plaque records that the building was erected in 1953 in memory of the sons and daughters of the suburb who served and died in war.

There are also other connections to the military. We prayed recently for chaplains serving the defence force. On the wall is an honour roll of the dead. We also hold a special ANZAC service each year.

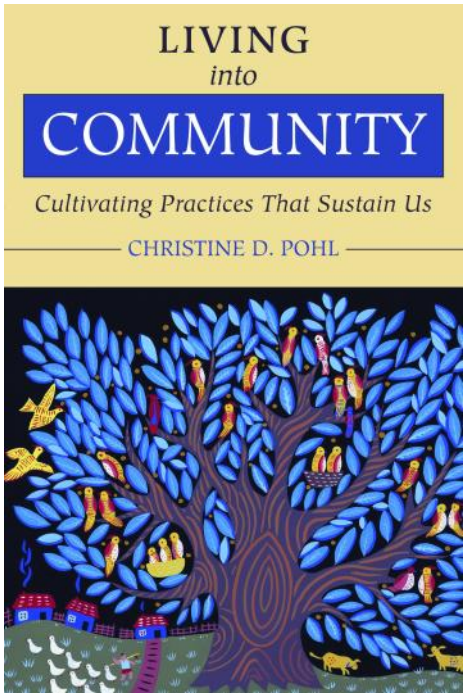
As a pacifist, I believe non-violence is a central part of the ethics of the kingdom. But the Anglican Church is never going to be a pacifist denomination, or even have a general tendency in that direction. It still holds the vestiges of its status as the state church, serving as a place for communities to mourn dead soldiers and make spiritual sense of war. I have sympathy for that; the juggernaut of war crushes ordinary people and leaves survivors needing to make sense of it. Yet, naturally, it is a point of great tension for me.

Imagine my joy, then, of learning that I attend a church named for a conscientious objector. The sixtieth anniversary of the church in November focused on Martin of Tours. He is a wonderful saint for Anglicans – a soldier wrestling with his conscience. He was born in 317, during the reign of Constantine, a period which can be seen as the turning point toward a militarized church. He was a Roman soldier who eventually decided his faith in Christ prevented him from fighting. Jailed as a conscientious objector, he offered to go before the enemy army unarmed. In some versions of the story, the enemy army fled; in others, the battle didn't happen as peace was negotiated first.

This would be an interesting point at which to probe our saint's example. Are we called, too, as Christ's saints to lay down the sword, and refuse to kill our enemies? The temptation is to see Martin of Tour's actions as the extreme, somewhat legendary, and completely unrealistic actions of a saint called to perfection, while the rest of us have to live in the real world. Yet the message of saints is surely meant to be that one does not have to be Jesus Christ to attempt to live a holy life, and that real men and women who follow Jesus can do it also.

Perhaps Martin of Tours was chosen as the name of the parish because he is the patron saint of soldiers and it felt appropriate for a memorial church. It seems a historical irony, or perhaps a holy paradox that he would be designated thus. Built into the designation is the challenge to each soldier who calls on him to wrestle with their conscience as he did and decide what it means to be a "soldier of Christ".

Review



Living Into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us
by Christine D. Pohl
(Eerdmans, 2012)

Christine D. Pohl is professor of Christian social ethics at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky. She is best known as the author of *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. I hadn't heard of her or read her previous book when I picked this one up at a seminary bookstore. A friend came into the bookstore looking for the book right after I purchased the last copy. He raved about her first book and was looking forward to reading this one.

Not only did my friend give Pohl high marks for her writing but so did others experienced in community living like Marva Dawn and Shane Claiborne.

Dawn says on the back cover:

> Every Christian should read this provocative book! Christine thoroughly delineates the interlocking relationships and dangerous deformities of practices that could deepen our communities but often destroy them. This volume is pertinent to our families, churches, even places of work.

Claiborne says:

> Christine Pohl was writing about community before it was hip. So now she is cutting edge. We read her stuff when we were starting our community over ten years ago, and it felt like she was reading our minds. Now her writing almost romantically reminds us of why we do the stuff we do. This book is great for those who are veterans of community and for those who are curious or even skeptics. Christine reminds us that we are created for, and in the image of, community -- but that doesn't mean it comes easy. This book is about the holy habits we need to cultivate if we are to experience and sustain real community.

Every community, church, and organisation, has experienced betrayal, deception, grumbling, envy, and exclusion. They make life together difficult and prevent communities from developing the skills, virtues, and practices they need.

In *Living into Community* Pohl looks at four specific Christian practices—gratitude, promise keeping, truth telling, and hospitality—that can counteract these destructive forces and help churches and individuals build and sustain vibrant communities. Drawing on concrete congregational experiences and interacting with the biblical, historical, and moral traditions, Pohl discusses each practice, including its possible complications and deformations, and points to how these essential practices can be better cultivated within congregations and families.

Pohl quotes frequently from authors like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Miroslav Volf, and Anabaptist/Mennonite writers Alan and Eleanor Kreider. The book has questions for discussion and a helpful bibliography.

In the book's introduction Pohl says, 'How we live together is the most persuasive sermon we'll ever get to preach.' (2) While many today are longing for experiences of living in community Pohl notes, 'The ways we've been formed by church and culture have not given us the skills or virtues we need to be part of the very communities we long for and try to create.' (4)

Here are some memorable quotes from the book.:

> While speaking about gratitude and how we often ignore the good things God has given us and instead dream of something better, one author said, "What this boils down to is spiritual pornography…creating a mental fantasy of a perfect place or people and not recognizing the good things all around me." (21)
>
> Dissatisfaction as a way of life is encouraged by a consumerist culture that feeds notions of entitlement… A cycle of generalised dissatisfaction fuels envy, striving and buying. (28)

> Keeping our promises is closely tied to personal integrity. We lose part of ourselves when we don't keep our word. (64)

In the same chapter on "Promises", she notes our culture's "premium on individual freedom and the capacity to choose." This leads to keeping "our options open" and seldom committing ourselves whether in "marriage, shopping for a house or a shirt, or joining a particular congregation. We hesitate to make final decisions because something better might be just around the corner." (71) Communities and organisations from footie clubs to churches can relate stories about this one. People are definitely "commitment-shy" today. Part of the problem is that members of groups see themselves "primarily as consumers" (72) rather than members with commitments to the community.

Pohl is realistic about conflict in communities. She knows there will be hurt, misunderstanding and at times misconduct. She says, "Redemptive responses to misconduct involve patience, confession, correction, forgiveness, and accountability within community… The gospel does not suggest that a life of faithfulness, love and service will protect us from disappointments and betrayals." (94)

Consistency in communities is important. As Jean Vanier has observed, "the essential nourishment of healthy communities is fidelity to the thousand and one small demands of each day." (105) From his vast experience in communities, Vanier concludes:

> The more we live community life, the more we discover that it is not so much a question of resolving problems as of learning to live with them patiently. Most problems are not resolved. With time, and a certain insight and fidelity in listening, they clear up when we least expect them to. But there will always be others to take their place! (106)

The chapters on truthfulness brought new insights for me. I was unaware of how much a problem "truth-telling" can be, particularly in churches. I was also unaware of the range of opinions on whether it is right to ever tell a lie.

Pohl quotes Alan Kreider on the wisdom of silence in a community that loves the truth.

> Speaking truthfully does not mean that we will always say everything we think or know. There is ample room, in the truthful life, for silence, discretion, the keeping of confidences and even the pleasantries that lubricate social interchange. (150)

On discernment, Pohl writes, "Creating a culture of truthfulness involves knowing when we should speak, and when it is appropriate to conclude that God is at work and we do not need to say anything." (152)

Because she already wrote a book on hospitality, she says less about it in this volume. But what she says is good:

> Hospitality is revelatory: if we invite people into our lives and homes, they'll see what's there. Hospitality and truthfulness meet here because welcome is not about putting on a show but inviting people into our lives as we live them. (166)

Pohl ties the different practices together in her last paragraph in a fitting end to her book and this review.

> We are not called to create ideal families, communities, or congregations. Building faithful communities of truth and hospitality, however, is at the heart of our grateful response to the one who 'became flesh and lived among us…full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). In the end, it is as simple and as complicated as 'loving those whom God has set beside us today.' (176)

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Contributor Profiles

Dave Andrews' latest book is Crux, published by Mosaic Press, www.mosaicresources.com.au.

David Griffin, from Vincentia, is a Baptist minister on study leave, pursuing a ThD in philosophy and ethics, with special interest in Anabaptist ethics. Currently a swim teacher and triathlete.

Mark Hurst is one of the pastoral/missional workers for AAANZ and co-pastor at Avalon Baptist Peace Memorial Church in Sydney. He shares both positions (and the rest of life) with Mary.

Nathan Hobby blogs at perthanabaptists.wordpress.com and works as librarian and academic dean at Vose Seminary.

Bessie Pereira began Oikos Ministries (www.oikos.org.au), and her legacy and influence continue through it and the many people whose lives she touched.

Doug Sewell is an architect in Sydney's Northern Beaches and a keen photographer.

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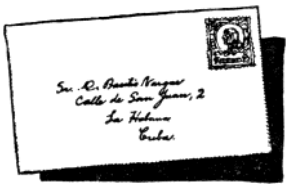

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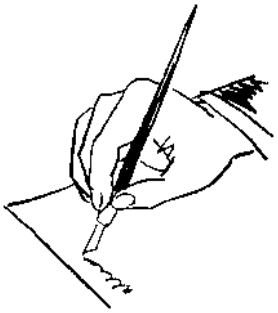

Submissions are welcome. To contribute, please send your piece to the editor, Nathan Hobby, nathanhobby@gmail.com. Submissions should be in Microsoft Word (any version) or Rich Text Format. Photos or illustrations are helpful. Please provide some brief notes for a profile on you—your city, your website, perhaps your interest in Anabaptism.

For referencing please use in-text style, with author, date and page number in brackets, followed by a bibliography at the end. **Please don't use endnotes or footnotes.**

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If you identify with the Anabaptist impulse and want to join the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand, visit www.anabaptist.asn.au.

Membership is open to individuals and groups who desire to make Jesus, community and reconciliation the centre of their faith, life and work.

Membership enables you to be connected to others in the network and join tele-chats with guest speakers from your own phone. You will also receive the quarterly prayer and contact calendar.

There is no membership fee, but we encourage you to contribute to the association and the work of our staffworkers, Mark and Mary Hurst.