

Congregational Mediation

Purposes and Overview of the Process

Purposes

1. To discern accurately the exact nature of the disagreement.
2. To give all of those involved in the conflict, or even all members of the congregation, a chance to voice their views on the disagreement.
3. To reduce tension in the congregation and facilitate healing of relationships.
4. To resolve the underlying interests behind people's differing positions, arriving at a solution everyone can at least live with, even if it is not their preferred choice.
5. To illustrate and teach conflict transformation techniques, to equip parties for the future.
6. To offer recommendations for improving the way the congregational system functions.
7. To do all of this in a way that glorifies God and strengthens the church.

Overview of the Process

1. Before the On-Site Work

- a. Meet with the church leadership board to outline their goals for the process.
- b. Clarify terms of the contract and schedule a series of dates to work on-site with the congregation.
- c. Gather information from all members of the congregation, via a questionnaire.
- d. Gather information from at least one representative of each of the different perspectives, via phone calls.

2. On-Site Work

- a. Conduct a training workshop on "Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches." A training workshop on "Healthy Congregations" may also be recommended.
- b. Meet with small groups in the congregation to provide people with an opportunity to voice their differing views and to gather more information about the basic interests behind such views.
- c. Meet with all in the congregation to facilitate healing and problem-solving, using structured dialogue techniques. Often several sessions are required for neutralizing past hurts and, then, working at problem-solving so as to build win-win agreements. A reconciliation ritual is often incorporated into the final large group session or during a Sunday morning worship service after the process is completed.
- d. If necessary, meet with any smaller groups to mediate remaining issues.
- e. If necessary, mediate any interpersonal conflicts.

3. After the On-Site Work

- a. Submit a written report to the congregation that summarizes the information gathered, stipulates any agreements reached, outlines our findings, and recommends what work the congregation might do in the future to implement the agreements and to address any structural concerns raised in the process.
- b. Contact the congregation periodically over several months to monitor progress at implementing the agreements.

Congregational Mediation: Steps in the Process

1. Contracting phase

- a. Clarify consultant's purposes and roles.
- b. Describe steps in the process and clarify goals for the process.
- c. Clarify terms of the contract: fees, scheduling, etc.

2. Education phase

- a. Training workshops.
- b. Ongoing equipping of members and coaching of leaders.

3. Information gathering phase

- a. Church constitution, past minutes, other relevant documents.
- b. Questionnaire.
- c. Telephone interviews.
- d. Small groups — Structured dialogue.
- e. Interim assessment report.

4. Healing phase

- a. Large group — Structured dialogue.
- b. Large group — Neutralizing history.
 - Distant past.
 - More recent past.
- c. Interpersonal mediation.

5. Problem-solving phase

- a. Reflection on interests.
- b. Brainstorm ideas.
- c. Evaluate ideas.
- d. Build agreements for the future.
- e. Official action taken to endorse the agreements.

6. Bringing closure to the process.

- a. Written report.
- b. Closing reconciliation service.
- c. Follow-up contacts.