

When we disagree: FIEC & Mediation in Churches

The Need for Mediation

Sometimes God's people disagree. It tends to happen over matters which are not prescribed in Scripture, but are instead what we might term "wisdom calls". One person thinks a particular course of action is required – another completely disagrees.

Think of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15. We read in verses 36-41 that they had such a sharp disagreement over the ministry of John Mark that they parted company over it. People don't always see eye to eye.

Wonderfully, we know that later in Paul's ministry he was reconciled to Mark. We don't know how it happened, but we see at the end of 2 Timothy (chapter 4 and verse 11) that Mark has become useful to Paul again. The Bible shows us that God's grace means that even the sharpest disagreements may not be lasting, and that God's people can be reconciled.

We know that in the course of gospel ministry, sharp disagreements like we see in Acts 15 arise in church life. They may be between leaders of a particular church or between leaders and members, but one thing is guaranteed: they do happen.

One of the ways FIEC wants to serve its churches is by providing mediation in these situations. Where sharp disagreements have taken place in church life, we believe it is wise to consider this course of action.

A Definition of Mediation

We define mediation as follows: **Mediation seeks an intervention between parties in a dispute to reach agreement or facilitate reconciliation.**

- > It presumes a dispute or differences between people.
- > It presumes people need external help to be brought together, to communicate clearly with each other and find a way ahead.

The purpose of mediation is neither to find fault or get everyone's absolute agreement. Rather, it is about trying to reconcile brothers and sisters in Christ, even if there needs to be some sort of parting of the ways like we see in Acts 15.

Our Aims in Mediation

If a church requests the help of FIEC in mediating because of disagreement, we will enter it with the following aims:

- > To bring a resolution that enables all parties to move forward, together, if possible.
- > To agree at the outset with all parties that this resolution is the aim of the mediation – it is not judicial or seeking to apportion blame.
- > To recognise that sometimes we may be in an Acts 15 situation where it is best to part ways, drawing a line in the sand.

The Role of the Mediator(s)

Members of the FIEC Ministry Team or trusted members of the Pastoral Ministries Support Team (with experience of serving in local FIEC churches) will be asked to serve as a mediator. He or she will be encouraged to work with another person on the mediation process.

Our commitment to churches and individuals involved in the mediation process is that the mediator will seek to:

- > Be neutral and objective
- > Listen to all sides carefully
- > Be relational not judicial
- > Foster restoration and not vindication
- > Be committed to prayer, conversation and interaction

The Process of Mediation

As mediation begins, all parties need to be reminded of the character of God which shapes the conversations that take place. Mediators will remind all parties involved in the process that:

- > God is sovereign (even over all that has led to the particular situation)
- > God loves truth (so the truth needs to be spoken)
- > God loves grace (we are people of grace and therefore we seek to show grace to each other)
- > God loves peace (we are called to be peacemakers following in the footsteps of Jesus)

The mediator will follow the steps outlined in this document with the aim of bringing reconciliation between parties.

It may be appropriate to agree to pay expenses to the Mediators involved.

What Happens if Further Problems are Revealed?

Sometimes Mediation may uncover behaviour that may be considered overbearing or bullying. If that happens, all those involved need to agree to allow the Mediator to be graciously truthful about areas of concern.

It's possible that mediation might lead to one or more of the parties considering they have experienced an abuse of power. In that scenario, if the concerns are not dealt with via mediation, the parties can be referred to our procedures for addressing of Spiritual Abuse in FIEC Churches. If someone involved wishes to utilise those FIEC procedures, the mediation process will come to an end.

Applying for Mediation

If a church seeks the help of FIEC in providing mediation the procedure is as follows:

1. A request submitted by phone or email.
2. FIEC send out our booklet introducing the work of the Pastoral Support Team.
3. FIEC ascertains that all parties agree to the basis upon which we offer mediation, as set out above, including what mediation is not. Mediation can only take place where all parties agree to enter into the process and agree to trust the process and work with the mediators. The meetings, outcomes and the details of the discussions will remain confidential unless all parties agree otherwise because this offers a level of confidence in the process and the mediator.
4. When all parties are agreed that mediation is appropriate, FIEC will ask for a brief outline summary of why mediation is sought. If FIEC and all parties are in agreement that mediation is the right next step, mediators will be then identified.
5. The Mediator(s) may then craft a brief questionnaire (based on the outline provided by the church) to be completed independently by all involved.
6. Meetings will be arranged to listen and clarify the facts and perceptions of those involved.
7. A meeting or meetings will be arranged to facilitate interaction between all parties. (A party to the Mediation can request that someone else attends a meeting with them to support them.)