

Serving

Pastors & Churches

in Trouble

An introduction
to the work of the
Pastoral Support Team.

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The Pastoral Support Team

Pastoral support is sometimes requested by both FIEC churches and pastors. Situations arise:

- with pastors individually;
- with pastors and their families;
- between pastors and elders;
- between elders and the church family (members and attendees);
- between churches.

It is an unending task with new situations arising all the time. Limits of time and energy mean the task cannot be fulfilled by one man.

For this reason, we have established a **Pastoral Support Team**.

Purpose:

To support the Associate National Director (with responsibility for Pastoral Ministries) in serving pastors and churches, especially when they encounter trouble.

Members:

Experienced Pastors (both serving and retired) willing to give some time to this work, and in particular to whom specific situations of care or trouble may be delegated.

A - Why the Pastoral Support Team has been established

Reason 1: The Mission of FIEC

FIEC is a fellowship of churches united in their desire to work together to reach Britain for Christ.

God's purpose is that His glory is put on display through local churches. That means the honour of the Lord Jesus is inseparable from the testimony of His body as it is expressed in local churches. The unity of God's people is both precious and important (Psalm 133 & John 17).

Reason 2: Realities of church life

Churches and pastors may have seasons of trouble. While prevention is better than cure, conflicts happen. Since trouble and mess will arise, the question is: how can the issue be resolved in a way that enables the church and/or the pastor to move forward in a way that honours our Lord Jesus?

Local churches need to learn to resolve issues themselves as guided by Scripture. Many do. But sometimes they reach a position where they cannot and need external help.

Church leaders are often faced with situations they have never encountered before.

There may be situations where either the pastor or the church is unaware of the problem.

Sometimes the best person to help is someone already known to all sides. However, on other occasions it is better if it is someone

completely neutral who can stand as a genuinely independent voice – with no history. Whichever way, FIEC's Associate National Director (with responsibility for Pastoral Ministries) cannot deal with every situation.

FIEC is often asked for help only when things have become quite desperate.

Pastors often think we always side with the churches; churches think we always side with the pastors. It is often a 'no win' situation. We may end up being criticised by both sides. It is important to remember, however, that there will always be two (or even three or more) sides to every story; we must avoid jumping to conclusions.

Sometimes the best result will be to draw a line in the sand which enables pastor and church to move forward, either apart or together. This will include encouraging those involved to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, allowing themselves to be wronged while entrusting themselves to the One who judges justly.

Where there is conflict there are always likely to be casualties. Courage and wisdom is required to gently point out sin where it is obvious, and to call for personal heart-searching where it is not.

No situation is identical. We cannot draw up guidelines that will cover every possible scenario. All we can do is suggest principles and possible ways to proceed.

Reason 3: As a Fellowship of churches, we cannot stand idly by

Trouble in churches does not advance our shared passion to reach Britain for Christ. If our fellowship/partnership is to be real, we must help each other when troubles arise.

Active fellowship includes working together for peace. We are called to be peacemakers. Peacemaking involves action.

Since every church in FIEC is independent, the Pastoral Support Team has no authority except the authority to serve and to plead in accordance with the scriptures (e.g. Philemon 9).

If a pastor is a member of the Pastors' Network (PN), he has signed up to our biblical standards of ministry and has said he wants to be held accountable to them. Even if a pastor is not a member of the PN, the church's membership of FIEC means we can offer to serve them in times of trouble.

Edward Connor Solicitors has produced a Dispute Resolution Paper (Appendix 1) to which churches may be referred, but the issues encountered are often *relational* rather than contractual or legal, requiring pastoral insight and wisdom.

B - What the Pastoral Support Team seeks to achieve as it serves pastors and churches

If there has been a breakdown of relationships, the Pastoral Support Team seeks to facilitate reconciliation between the parties on the basis of grace and truth. This may well involve repentance, often on both sides of a dispute.

Whatever the situation, we want to help those involved to reach a point that enables a local church and/or its pastor to move on with a renewed focus on the advance of the gospel of our Lord Jesus and the honour of His Name. Sometimes this may include a pastor stepping down and moving on.

C - How the Pastoral Support Team works

1. The Associate National Director (AND) hears of a pastor or church in trouble (either because the pastor or church contacts FIEC or through the FIEC grapevine).
2. The AND makes contact with the pastor or church and seeks to triage the situation. He explains that he has a team who help him in his role.
3. The AND emails out to some members of the Team summarising the situation and asking if someone could let him know if they are willing to make contact with the pastor/church.
4. The AND tells the pastor/church who will be in contact.
5. The member of the Team then acts independently on behalf of FIEC, able to refer back to the AND at any point. The member of the Team may enlist the help of another pastor or leader to assist.
6. The member of the Team writes a one-page summary of what happened, sending it to the AND for FIEC records.
7. Churches are welcome to offer to meet expenses.
8. There will be GDPR issues to consider as the work is being carried out on behalf of FIEC. We will take steps to ensure GDPR rules are followed and data kept secure.
9. If there has been a breach of the law, referrals to the appropriate authorities must be made.

Appendix 1: Draft Dispute Resolution Procedure by Edward Connor Solicitors

Learn more about Edward Connor Solicitors at edwardconnor.com

Dispute Resolution

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16,17).

1. Introduction

Reconciliation of Christians is a biblical duty.

In order to facilitate both understanding of the process of reconciliation and the reconciliation process itself, there are a number of ground rules that must be set out in advance that will need to be agreed and adhered to by the parties involved.

If, for whatever reason, all participants are not genuinely committed to proceed on the basis of these ground rules then it is important that the process is halted. Jesus' strong condemnation of hypocrites should be our warning. Therefore, the fact that one participant may feel unable to proceed on this basis does not mean that the other would be justified as seeing them as in some way blameworthy or at fault.

It is beneficial to appoint someone both participants trust to act as mediator/arbitrator. That person should have no vested interest in the outcome. It is often worthwhile to appoint an outside Christian who specialises in workplace disputes to act as an independent outside mediator/arbitrator. This can give all parties reassurance in the integrity of the process. Edward Connor Solicitors has such professionals available to assist in disputes.

2. Ground Rules

2.1 Confession

The first ground rule is absolute honesty.

Participation must be wholehearted. Nothing should be concealed. If the participants are wishing to enter into this process in the hope that it will allow something to be concealed or hidden it will not work. Lies and any desire to deceive do not emanate from Christ.

This should also be a confidential process. It may not be appropriate for information shared during this process to be passed on by a participant to any third party without the knowledge and consent of all involved. Normally any mediator/arbiter would be expected to keep confidential all that is discussed. An exception to this would be where there is a legal obligation to do so - for example, under the Terrorism Act, the Proceeds of Crime Act or to protect a person from abuse.

- 2.2** The process will not work if all participants are not absolutely honest. It should be stressed that if the process does not work and there is litigation, the litigation process is an adversarial one designed to ensure that information someone may want to conceal will be revealed.

2.3 Repentance

The second ground rule is humility.

All participants must be prepared to step back from being in control, particularly when entrusting the issue to a third party. If one participant sees this process as a route to dominating the other party or exercising control over them, the process will not work. The participants will need to trust and pray that the Lord will use the process, and those assisting with it, to achieve His will rather than need it to meet their own preconception of what a "just outcome" would look like.

2.4 Forgiveness

The third ground rule is the desire for reconciliation.

Reconciliation may not always be possible between the participants, but if a participant is seeking vindication, then the process will not succeed. Each participant must be willing to be restored to the other. If a participant has preconditions, for example that an apology is required or a debt paid, then the process will not work.

Reconciliation does not mean agreeing with each other. Reconciliation may involve paying a price and/or forgiving a debt. It is not disregarding what is evil but using love to overcome it.

3. What is involved?

Communication is fundamental to the process. If a person is appointed as a mediator/arbiter, they should not be there to advise or represent either participant, but to facilitate effective communication.

1st Stage

The first stage of the process involves the mediator/arbiter establishing what each participant is seeking to achieve.

2nd Stage

The second stage involves them collating information from the participants that will help and sharing it. This includes communicating clearly what each participant believes the issues are and considering any biblical principles that the participants (or mediator/arbiter) consider to be relevant.

3rd Stage

The third stage will be identifying a resolution. That may involve making a determination or agreeing how the parties can otherwise

reconcile their differences and move forward. It may be important for the participants to understand any potential consequences, for example, the risk of legal action, where there is no resolution.

4. Next steps

- All three ground rules should be earnestly prayed through by each participant.
- In the schedule to this document are a number of scriptural references for study before agreeing to proceed.
- Each individual participant should make a private and personal commitment to the process and to honour that commitment throughout the process.

Schedule 1

Matthew 3:8

Matthew 5:23,24

Matthew 5:25,26

Matthew 18:15-20

Matthew 18:21-35

Luke 3:8-14

Luke 17: 1-4

1 John 1:5-10

2 Corinthians 2:10

2 Corinthians 7:8-13

2 Corinthians 7:9-11

Galatians 6:1-10

Galatians 6:14-16

Colossians 3:13

1 Timothy 5:24

Hebrews 13:1-21

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