



## WHAT IS CHRISTIAN MEDIATION?

### Background

For many people involved in a conflict, mediation may be something new and relatively unknown. This document explains what mediation is in general, and the particular kind of mediation that we use at PeaceWise.

### What is Christian mediation?

Mediation involves asking a third party not connected with a conflict to become involved, in order to help the parties work together to address in a constructive way issues that have arisen relating to a conflict between them. Christian mediation aims to do these things against the background of biblical principles. Christian mediators are as concerned with reconciling the parties on a *relational* level as with helping them to settle their *material* differences.

However, Christian mediators are also sensitive to where parties are in their personal spiritual journeys, and will always work in a way which is respectful of each party's beliefs.

### What kind of mediation do we use?

Different mediators approach the role in different ways. No one way is "right", but it is important that the parties understand the approach to be taken by the mediator of their conflict.

These are some of the major features of the way we approach mediation:

#### *Impartiality*

- Any prior association that the mediator has with any of the parties will be disclosed up front, and both parties must be happy to proceed if such a prior association exists.
- The mediator will be '*impartial*', in the sense that he will act in an even-handed way, will have no direct personal interest (financial or otherwise) in the outcome of the conflict and will treat the parties fairly during the process.

#### *Neutrality and the role of Christian principles and the parties' values*

- The mediator will not necessarily be '*neutral*', in the sense of not commenting on material issues, and having no input other than to facilitate the discussion. This is because there may be times when it is appropriate to bring the relevance of what the Bible teaches, or a party's expressed values, into the context of the conflict, and to encourage the parties to consider their actions in the light of these things. *This will always be done sensitively*, and typically will be raised with one party privately first.
- The reason this kind of contribution may sometimes be appropriate is that, unlike in secular mediation, Christians are committed to help parties achieve relational restoration, and not simply to address presenting material issues.
- Examples of the kind of principles that may be raised include the following – these are Christian principles, however they are also broadly accepted moral principles which we find most parties willingly embrace for the mediation process:

- each party will be honest (Eph 4:25) and will keep their word (Matt 5:37)
- each party will be willing to own what is theirs to own in contributing to the conflict (Ps 139:23-24, Matt 7:1-5)
- each party will be open to truly seek to see the other party's point of view and look to their interests as well (Phil 2: 3-4, 1 Cor 10:24)
- each party will be willing to change harmful attitudes and behaviour (Prov 28:13)
- each party will be open to forgiveness and reconciliation (Eph 4:32, Col 3:13, Matt 18:21-35)

#### *It is the parties' conflict*

- One of the great strengths of mediation is that it is the parties and not the mediator who have responsibility for what decisions are taken both on the material issues in conflict and the relational issues.
- Therefore, the mediator will encourage the parties to work towards their own resolution of the issues, and **will not impose any solution or outcome on the parties.**
- Parties are encouraged to agree between them what will be reported back to any stakeholders in the conflict.

#### *The process that we use*

- The mediation process that we use is based on that devised by Peacemaker Ministries adapted for Australia. A detailed description of the mediation process we use is included as our Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation, which is an attachment to the mediation agreement we use, which is found at our website [www.peacewise.org.au](http://www.peacewise.org.au)
- Initially, we will meet or communicate with the parties to ensure everyone understands the process that will be followed.
- Frequently, where this is possible, we will meet with the parties separately before any joint mediation meeting takes place.
- During joint meetings, we will seek to encourage the parties to raise and work through the issues – sometimes we may have private meetings with the parties during joint mediation sessions if we believe this will be helpful or there are things that need to be shared in private. Any information shared in private session will be kept confidential, unless a party agrees for it to be shared with the other party, or something arises which we are legally obliged to disclose. In the case of serious unrepentant sin involving Christians, we do reserve the right to raise this matter directly with the leadership of the church attended by the party in question. In practice, we have never needed to do this as yet.
- In the mediation session, we will typically follow the following general stages:
  - G – Greeting and ground rules
    - make introductions and agree how we will work together
  - O – Opening statements
    - ask each party to briefly explain what he or she hopes will happen out of the mediation
  - S – Storytelling
    - help each party to tell their story and hear the other party's perspective
  - P – Problem identification and clarification
    - clearly define central issues and interests
  - E – Explore solutions
    - brainstorm options, evaluate them reasonably and objectively
  - L – Lead to agreement
    - encourage and document things that the parties agree on and what they will each do

We are prayerfully looking forward to being able to serve you in your present circumstances.

*Bruce Burgess*

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