

The Mediation Process

1. INTAKE SESSIONS – Meeting with small groups rather than conducting one large meeting usually provides the most relevant information. It also provides a better setting for discussion. Each group should be composed of persons who share strong feelings about a particular concern. For example, one group might be made up of persons who particularly are concerned about worship style. Individuals who feel communications within the church is the major concern would comprise a group. Another group might be made up of persons who particularly are concerned about some aspect of how the pastor functions.

Not everyone who wishes to express his/her views may have strong feelings about a particular concern, and should be included in a group with others who simply wish to express themselves about the situation. The size of any group should be no larger than six to eight persons. Allotting 15 minutes for each person, this size allows sufficient time for everyone to participate without making an intake session uncomfortably long. A 10 to 15-minute break between sessions is advisable.

Should a particular concern be such that many persons wish to provide comments, several small groups consisting of persons sharing that concern should be scheduled. Every congregation usually has members who may not feel problems exist, who are “neutral” about any concerns that have been raised or who do not wish to be identified with proponents of a particular position. Members in these categories may not be interested in participating in an intake session, but should be encouraged to do so because such persons often provide insights not otherwise available. If someone simply is not comfortable as part of a group, that person can meet individually with the Help Team.

One or two persons with good “people skills” and not caught up emotionally with any aspect of the situation should be asked to coordinate the scheduling of intake sessions. A Help Team member can provide assistance as needed. Individuals who are unable to attend an intake session, but wish to provide input, can contact one of the designated Help Team members by telephone. The Help Team will meet separately with the pastor(s).

The preference is to schedule all intake sessions on the same day. Saturday usually is the day preferred by most individuals. If more than one day is necessary to ensure everyone who wishes to be heard has that opportunity, intake sessions also can be scheduled on either Friday evening or on Sunday afternoon of the same weekend as the Saturday intake sessions.

2. ANALYSIS OF SITUATION – An analysis of information gathered during intake sessions and during telephone conversations will be prepared by the Help Team within two weeks after obtaining the information, unless a different schedule is established. This analysis will be provided to the contact person(s) for distribution to everyone who provided input.

3. MEDIATION SESSION – Before scheduling the mediation session, at least two weeks should be allowed for everyone to review the analysis provided by the Help Team and to contact Help Team members with questions or to discuss the analysis. Generally, between 12 and 16 persons is the maximum number of participants for an effective mediation. An advocate of each of the various issues determined to be in need of resolution must participate in the mediation.

Each participant must have what might be termed the authority to agree to resolutions proposed during the mediation for inclusion in a Memorandum of Agreement. This means at least some participants in the mediation will have to be acceptable as representatives by other persons sharing the same view. A person might be a participant due to holding a position integral to an issue to be resolved, such as a choir director. The Help Team can provide assistance in determining who should participate in the mediation session, and may suggest possible participants.

