

Pastoral Mediation in Sovereign Grace

Introduction:

Christians are called to love one another, to seek reconciliation with one another, to live peacefully with one another, and to confess our sins against one another. (Matthew 5:23, John 13:34, Philippians 4:2, Acts 15:39, Ephesians 4:1-3, James 5:16). Pastors are called to model these relational standards, yet, like all Christians, they can fall into enduring conflicts or disagreements, even with their fellow pastors.

When such conflicts arise, the first recourse should always be relational and informal, taking advantage of the wise counsel of local pastors, Regional Leaders, or regional pastors who are not involved in the conflict. Yet, in some moments these informal efforts are insufficient. The Sovereign Grace adjudication process is available, but filing a formal charge may go beyond what the conflict warrants—especially if the conflict centers around personal or ministry disagreements or offenses that do not rise to the level of pastoral disqualification.

In these difficult situations, the mediation process outlined below could provide a helpful path for two pastors who are seeking to honor the Lord and seeking reconciliation or resolution with each other. It is not designed to reproduce professional mediation services available for the wider body of Christ, but rather to serve pastors in Sovereign Grace Churches who are experiencing conflict and desire a more formal structure of help with reconciliation or resolution.

Mediation Process:

- 1) A SGC pastor must initiate the process toward another pastor or pastors. The Regional Leader will receive this request and work with both parties to choose a suitable mediator. If the Regional Leader is personally involved in the dispute the request can go to the Leadership Team.
- 2) Both parties must agree to a particular mediator. If both parties cannot agree on one impartial person, the mediation cannot proceed.
- 3) The mediator must be an ordained pastor in SGC.
- 4) The goal of the mediation is the settling of the conflict either through:
 - Repentance and forgiveness for sin or the acknowledgement of a mistake from one or both parties resulting in reconciliation.
 - A decision to entrust the ongoing disagreement to the Lord without further action.

- A decision of one party to file charges against the other according to the SGC adjudication procedure. The mediation does not mitigate the right of either party to pursue adjudication at the conclusion of the mediation.
- A decision from one or both parties to pursue peaceful separation from one another in church membership or ministry

5) The travel/accommodation cost for the mediation will be as follows:

- If a single church is involved, the local church will cover the travel cost for the mediation, though the church may request financial help from the region.
- If two or more churches are involved, each church will cover the travel cost of their own participants, though either church may request financial help from the region.
- If the mediator is not a part of either church involved, both churches shall share the travel cost of the mediator, though both churches may request financial help from the region(s).
- The mediator may be compensated for his work by the region(s) or churches whose pastors are involved in the mediation. The mediator should be informed prior to accepting the mediation what compensation (if any) will be provided.

6) Both parties must agree in writing to:

- Participate in good faith in a number of meetings or a certain period of time to be determined by the mediator. (Normally this mediation process should not exceed six months and the pace should be considerate of ongoing pastoral responsibilities.)
- Abide by the direction and homework assignments of the mediator.
- Not bring charges on the same issue being discussed until the mediation is concluded.
- Not publicly divulge information learned in the mediation about the other party.

7) The role of the mediator is to:

- Meet individually with both parties prior to the joint meeting .
- Remind both parties of the goal of honoring the Lord, loving the other party, and speaking in truth and love.
- Assure both parties that he will mediate in the fear of the Lord without partiality toward either person.
- Listen thoroughly to the offenses/defenses/disagreements of both parties.
- Moderate the conversation to avoid clearly hyperbolic or unnecessarily provocative or angry communication toward one another.
- Recommend spiritual or practical homework for the purpose of moving each party forward in his biblical understanding of the situation or his own heart.

- Attempt to provide clarity where there may be misunderstanding or miscommunication.
 - Seek factual validation on issues of disagreement where possible.
 - Attempt to help one/both parties distinguish between clear sin, a matter of wisdom, or a preference.
 - Attempt to help one or both parties see any way in which they have clearly sinned against each other and encourage them toward repentance and forgiveness.
 - Attempt to restore any diminished love and unity between the parties.
- 8) At the conclusion of the mediation, the mediator will render a recommendation based on his best judgment as to the wisest course of action for both parties. This recommendation is not binding in any sense. Both parties will be given 30 days to respond in writing as to whether they will follow the recommendation.