

OKLAHOMA ANNUAL CONFERENCE CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION MINISTRY

The Oklahoma Annual Conference Conflict Transformation Ministry (OCCTM) is organized to assist laity and clergy of the Oklahoma Conference in working toward healthier congregations. Conflict is a normal part of relationships, including church family relationships. Recognizing that sometimes relationships need to seek outside assistance to work through tough times, the OCCTM provides qualified, trained Conflict Transformation Teams (CTT) to assist congregations to work through conflict and transform it to a healthier relationship.

THE PROCESS

When the cabinet discerns that a situation/congregation would benefit from the work of Conflict Transformation Ministry, the District Superintendent of the congregation wishing to participate initiates contact with the OCCTM Leadership Team. The OCCTM Team Leader will contact the pastor, SPRC Chair, and DS to determine if it is an appropriate situation for mediation. In this initial contact, the DS will provide specific information so that the OCCTM leadership team can then determine which team members will be deployed as the Conflict Transformation Team (CTT) for that situation.¹ After this initial intake, the DS would be kept informed throughout the process, but would not have an active role in the mediation process.² The OCCTM needs a minimum of two-weeks' notice to determine the team members and schedule an initial intake meeting with the congregation.

A CTT consists of two people (ideally one clergy and one laity) who have been trained in Mediation Skills by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. If trained laity are not available, then two clergy may work together. A potential third team member may be needed, as determined by the OCCTM team following the initial intake.

The stages of the mediation process are as follows:

- Assessment/Contracting Stage
- Story-Telling Stage
- Problem-Solving Stage
- Agreement Stage³

At all stages of the process, the congregation and those representing the various sides are commended for agreeing to participate in this process.

Assessment/Contracting Stage

Following contact from the District Superintendent, the OCCTM would send in the CTT to do an initial assessment. The congregation may be required to provide some initial information prior to this meeting (for example, a history of the congregation and missional self-study). At this initial meeting, which may take 2-3 hours, the CTT

¹ See LMPC Manual D-4 (Mediation Intake Sheet)

² Should there be a situation that would require mediation with a District Superintendent, the Bishop would be the appropriate initiator of the process, and would then be kept informed.

³ See LMPC Manual D-32 (The Mediation Process)

explains the conflict transformation process, the role of the CTT, and the ground rules for the process.

A general statement of purpose (without getting into specific issues) is given by the CTT. The CTT explains confidentiality (all specifics are kept in confidence by all participants, unless it is something that the CTT must report by law). It will be explained that the CTT is keeping the District Superintendent informed of the progress, not the specifics, unless it is something that should be reported by the Book of Discipline.

Costs are discussed, and a contract for mediation services is agreed upon by the CTT and the Congregation⁴. The fee schedule proposed is:

- \$120.00 per hour on-site time for two mediators
- \$40.00 per hour for off-site time.
- \$20.00 per hour for travel, set-up, and on-site down-time.

Following this meeting, the contract will be submitted to the DS for approval. This contract should be signed by a lay member of the church with authority to enter into this contract (Church Council Chair, Lay Leader, SPRC Chair) as determined by the congregation, as well as the pastor, the district superintendent, and the CTT members. The first date for the team to work with the congregation will be scheduled at this meeting. It should

Story Telling Stage

At the next meeting, the parties each take turns explaining the situation from their perspective. The mediator summarizes each side of the situation. After this stage, a break may be had so the CTT can develop a list of issues to be discussed in the next stage.

Problem Solving Stage

Following the Story Telling stage, the CTT will lead the parties into the problem solving stage. This stage starts by listing commonalities and points of agreement. Then the CTT will list issues for discussion, and begin the process with the easiest issue. Each party will be interviewed documenting interests.

The CTT will then state reframing questions (how can we resolve this in a way that addresses the need for...), and lead the parties into brainstorming multiple options for resolution jointly. All ideas will be evaluated and a resolution agreeable to all will be formulated. This process is repeated for all issues moving from easiest to the most difficult.

Healing strategies will be implemented at various points in the problem solving stage. As intense feelings surface and hurts emerge, the CTT will implement such strategies as paraphrasing issues by mediator, coaching, direct dialogue, and coaching the parties

⁴ See LMPC Manual D-5 and 6 (Agreement to Enlist Mediation Services; Mediation Waiver and Consent Form.)

in paraphrasing the interests of the other party. This is to reduce escalation of the issues during the process.

Agreement Stage

If not done previously, the specifics of agreements will be worked through and listed. (Who does what, when, how, and where?) Write out the agreements, making sure they are balanced and non-judgmental. Care is taken to make sure the agreement is clear, simple, and realistic.

Have both parties sign the agreement, and give copies to both parties, and the District Superintendent. To the extent that any part of the agreement involves something that is of interest to the Conference, (i.e., building concerns, the pastor, etc.), the DS must also sign the agreement.

Following reaching an agreement the CTT will lead the parties in strategies to promote emotional closure. This includes statements of appreciation and statements of regret, confession, apology to the other party. If possible, a service of healing, reconciliation, and celebration is facilitated by the CTT.

PARAMETERS

OCCTM team members are trained to facilitate the mediation process and provide a non-anxious presence in highly anxious situations. While the goal of the process is resolution and reconciliation, reaching that goal is the work of the congregation. The CTT walks with them, using skilled training and steps listed to provide the best possible outcome of the process.

Situations that would benefit from the mediation process are:

- issues involving behaviors (i.e., sharing space, personal treatment, respecting boundaries, following through on promises)
- issues involving things (i.e., property, repairs, reimbursement)
- issues involving structure and systems (i.e., how things are done, rules and regulations, procedures, schedules, job responsibilities)

Concerns that may be discussed, but not typically negotiated are:

- beliefs, principles, and values
- prejudices
- personalities, personal style, management style, attitudes
- emotions, hurt, anger, trust
- blame, fault
- perceptions (what “really” happened)
- right and wrong

Some situations are not suited to the mediation process. These include:

- addictive behaviors,
- pathological or abusive behaviors,
- too wide a gap between the parties interests,

- any situation in which the real decision maker is not present or situations where people whose cooperation is needed or who may be significantly impacted by a decision are not represented,
- any issue requiring investigation and disclosure before fair negotiation can take place.⁵

Mediation is not an appropriate substitute for therapy or counseling, and should never be used to coerce people or events to a desired end. Further, mediation should not be used to replace the proper exercise of authority, or when power should not be balanced. Mediation should not be used too early in the process when surface issues do not resolve root causes of conflict. Mediation is an appropriate process for resolving community conflict if all parties are seeking resolution and reconciliation.⁶

As the work of the OCCTM and team is not enforceable by a court of law, mediation is not appropriate for any situation that is better handled in litigation, or that could escalate toward litigation. There are other agencies which provide mediation prior to litigation services that may be better suited to these needs.

Every effort will be made by the CTT and the OCCTM Leadership to work through the process to reduce anxiety which can lead to escalation. However, should a conflict escalate to a level that the CTT is not able to manage by healing strategies, this development would be reported to the District Superintendent, and a determination will then be made on how to move forward. This may occur because one or more of the parties are unwilling to work through the process regardless of agreeing to the contract and the process. The District Superintendent may wish to explain to the congregation what is at stake or next steps should an agreeable resolution not be reached.

The OCCTM leadership team members are accountable to one another, and will be evaluated regularly by peer review. Potential CTT members should recuse themselves from participating on a team if there is a conflict of interest (i.e., the clergy team member's home church, a close relationship with a member or clergy that would cause a perceived unfair bias.)

MEDIATION TEAM MEMBERS

The members of the mediation team and OCCTM have the following requirements:

1. They must have participated in the LMPC Mediation Skills Training
2. They must be a member in good standing of the Oklahoma Annual Conference
3. They must be recommended by their District Superintendent or another member of the OCCTM team.
5. A portion of their yearly CEUs should be toward strengthening their mediation skills.
6. Each Conflict Transformation Team Member is required to participate in peer group process quarterly for the process of debriefing, training, and accountability.

⁵ See LMPC Manual D-30 (Does this Issue Belong in Mediation?)

⁶ See LMPC Manual D-27-28 (When to Mediate?)

Note: LMPC Clergy Clinic is not directly related to mediation – but is useful for teaching and for clergy care in our area. Conflict Transformation Team Members benefit from ongoing learning through Clergy Clinic.

OTHER SERVICES OF THE OCCTM

In addition to providing mediation in the Oklahoma Conference, the OCCTM can provide training on healthy congregations, conflict transformation, and communication skills.