CONFLICT REPAIR IN CHURCH LIFE

Faith-informed restorative mediation for congregations seeking to respond to harm, rebuild trust, and strengthen relationships with dignity and accountability.

SEEKING REPAIR IS NOT AN ADMISSION OF FAILURE

Church leaders may hesitate to request help because it sounds like declaring, "We have a problem." Members may voice a need for repair long before leaders respond. Addressing conflict is an act of faithful stewardship, not a verdict on the congregation.

WHAT CARES PROVIDES

Restorative mediation offers a prepared, impartial, and voluntary process for people affected by a specific conflict to be heard, understand impact, accept appropriate responsibility, clarify needs, and explore repair where possible. It does not promise agreement, forgiveness, or restored closeness.

WHERE CHURCH CONFLICT MAY APPEAR

LEADERSHIP + GOVERNANCE

Elder teams, boards, pastor–leader tensions, and difficult decisions.

MINISTRY TEAM STRAIN

Roles, expectations, communication breakdowns, and perceived disrespect.

MEMBER RELATIONSHIPS

Interpersonal hurts, unresolved offenses, and fractured fellowship.

CHANGE + TRANSITION

Disputes surrounding leadership changes, ministry direction, or shared expectations.

WHY A CHURCH-SPECIFIC APPROACH MATTERS

Congregational relationships mix faith, belonging, authority, history, and shared ministry. CARES helps leaders address these dynamics without using Scripture, spiritual authority, or unity language to pressure anyone into silence or reconciliation.

Consideration: "The conscious regard for the needs, values, and dignity of others, especially when making decisions."

A responsible path from avoidance to action

An initial consultation determines fit, safety, participants, and an appropriate scope. CARES will not assume every church conflict should move into mediation.

A TYPICAL RESTORATIVE MEDIATION ENGAGEMENT

01 ASSESS READINESS

Identify the concern, participants, consent, risks, power dynamics, and referral needs.

02 PREPARE INDIVIDUALLY

Private preparation clarifies experiences, needs, boundaries, and willingness to participate.

03 FACILITATE DIALOGUE

A trained mediator supports listening, impact recognition, responsibility, and respectful exchange.

04 CLARIFY NEXT STEPS

Where appropriate, document voluntary commitments, boundaries, and agreed follow-up.

SCOPE, DELIVERABLES & CHURCH RESPONSIBILITIES

Scope: may involve two individuals, a ministry team, church leaders, or multiple parties. The number of participants, individual preparation, facilitated sessions, follow-up, and any additional team learning are defined in a written proposal.

CARES deliverables: agreed assessment and preparation, trained facilitation, a confidential process within stated limits, and a summary of mutually agreed next steps when appropriate. **Church role:** authorize an independent process, provide a liaison and appropriate setting, respect voluntary participation, and support follow-through.

SAFEGUARDS: REPAIR MUST NOT REPLACE PROTECTION

Mediation is not an investigation, disciplinary hearing, or substitute for safeguarding, legally required reporting, or clinical care. Abuse, coercion, threats, misconduct, or major power imbalances may make mediation inappropriate. Safety and required protective processes come first.

INVESTMENT & FUNDING

Investment: individualized proposal, not a fixed fee. Budget considers number of parties, preparation, complexity, facilitation sessions, follow-up, and any travel. Potential funding partners include church boards, conference or district leadership, and designated ministry or donor funds.

DECISION-MAKER'S NEXT STEP

Authorize a private scoping conversation. Identify a liaison, decision authority, and possible funding source. **careslp.org/contact/**