

## ALLIANCE BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

# RECONCILE MINISTRY OVERVIEW

## Engaging and Resolving Marriage Conflicts God's Way

Married couples involved in conflicts with one another should seek to honor Jesus Christ and please Him by fully pursuing the resolution of their disputes and reconciliation and the restoration of their relationship with each other. RECONCILE is a gospel-centered, scripture-based ministry that helps spouses and couples in conflict achieve these outcomes. We want you to understand how RECONCILE may serve you. We also want you to know what RECONCILE needs to help you effectively. This is how RECONCILE works at Alliance.

### Getting Started with RECONCILE

RECONCILE serves couples who are referred by one of our pastors. When you contact one of our pastors for help, you will receive a RECONCILE Referral Request form to complete and return to the pastor. If the pastor determines that RECONCILE can help you, your RECONCILE Referral Request will be forwarded to the RECONCILE Director. The Director will contact you by phone to obtain more information regarding your situation and to answer any questions you have. The Director will send our RECONCILE Coaching and Mediation Procedures (which govern the services provided by RECONCILE) along with forms for you and your spouse to complete and return.

### RECONCILE Process Questions and Preliminary Information

You and your spouse should carefully read the RECONCILE Procedures and other information provided by the Director. After you have reviewed this information, we encourage you to call the Director with any questions you have. Once all your questions have been answered and you have completed and returned all the requested forms, the Director will let you know which of our services will best meet your needs. If your spouse is not willing to participate, the service we can provide to you is **coaching**. If you and your spouse are willing to participate, we can provide **mediation**. The Director will provide a RECONCILE Services Agreement for our service in your situation. The agreement provided must be signed and returned to the Director before we can move ahead.

### Assignment of a Peace Advocate

The Director will assign one or two Peace Advocates to your case after receiving the signed RECONCILE Services Agreement. The Director will provide you with the name and contact information of the Peace Advocate(s) assigned to serve you.

### Coaching

If a spouse declines to participate, your Peace Advocate(s) will guide and help you take steps to reconcile your conflicts and resolve your disputes with your spouse on your own. Your Peace Advocate(s) will also help you encourage your spouse to participate so that you can pursue reconciliation and resolution together. Coaching services are provided through telephone and video conferences. Your Peace Advocate(s) may assign "homework" to help you better understand and apply biblical peacemaking principles in your situation. Your Peace Advocate(s) will notify you when they determine that further

coaching will not be helpful. You may terminate coaching at any time you wish by emailing your Peace Advocate(s) and the Director.

### **Mediation**

If you and your spouse agree to participate, the Director will assign your case for mediation. In mediation, the Peace Advocate acts as a mediator to assist and guide couples in reconciling their conflicts and resolving their disputes. The Peace Advocate has no authority to decide anything. For anything to be decided, both spouses must agree. The spouses retain control over whether agreement is reached on some or all the issues. There are three parts in the mediation process.

- **Preparation for Mediation.** Adequate preparation by both spouses is the key to obtaining the best possible outcomes. You cannot apply biblical peacemaking principles to your situation unless you are familiar with those principles. Your Peace Advocate will assign “homework” to help you with this preparation. That homework may involve reading an article or a book, answering questions, watching a video, preparing a list, writing a letter or essay, or completing other activities your Peace Advocate believes will help you prepare. Each spouse is responsible for completing all homework assigned. The homework assigned to each spouse might be different. Your Peace Advocate may request a telephone or online video conference with one spouse or the other to discuss the homework assigned. The amount of time necessary for both spouses to adequately prepare for mediation meetings varies depending on the facts and circumstances of the case. Preparation may take a week or two. It may take longer. Your Peace Advocate will determine when both spouses have adequately prepared for joint mediation meetings. If your Peace Advocate determines that one or both spouses are unwilling or unable to sufficiently prepare, your Peace Advocate may suspend mediation and notify the Director. The Director will determine the conditions under which mediation may resume, whether to offer coaching to one spouse or the other, or whether the case will be terminated.
- **Pre-Meeting Conference with Peace Advocate.** Once both spouses have adequately prepared, a separate pre-meeting conference with your Peace Advocate will be scheduled with each spouse. During this conference, your Peace Advocate will review the processes and procedures that apply to mediation meetings and help each spouse prepare for them. Typically, these pre-meeting conferences are conducted by telephone or video conference.
- **Mediation Meetings.** Because of its biblical nature, mediation encourages spouses to communicate openly and candidly with each other. Mediation provides an environment where spouses may speak freely to each other without fear. Most mediation meetings are held in person. Meetings may occasionally be conducted by video conference. At the first mediation meeting, the ground rules will be established, and each party can make a brief opening statement. After this, your Peace Advocate will allow each spouse to share the facts and circumstances they believe are important and their perspectives, concerns, and objectives. Your Peace Advocate will work to ensure that each spouse hears the views and concerns of the other spouse, as this is essential to a full and fair resolution of the issues. While you will spend most of your time in mediation meetings together, your Peace Advocate may ask to speak with one spouse privately to address a particular point of concern that deserves individual attention or consideration. Your Peace Advocate will work diligently to identify all the critical issues and explore all potential solutions. While the outcome can never be guaranteed, your Peace Advocate will help you walk with the Lord, reach reconciliation, and resolve all the issues you face to the fullest extent possible.

The goal of mediation is to help couples, with the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, apply biblical truth in their marriage and make commitments to each other that honor and please the Lord. Depending upon the nature of the conflict and the issues involved, this may take more than one meeting. Understandings reached and promises made by the couple are memorialized in a written Memorandum of Understanding, which provides the couple with a roadmap and reminders for their marriage in the future.

### **Services RECONCILE DOESN'T Provide**

All persons serving in RECONCILE are volunteers. They serve because they love Jesus and desire to support, assist, and encourage married couples experiencing difficult times. Because of this, you must understand that there are limitations on the services provided by RECONCILE and its Peace Advocates.

1. Peace Advocates are not professional counselors or marriage mentors. While Peace Advocates will offer guidance and direction during Coaching and Mediation, their counsel is based on biblical principles and focuses on the attitudes or actions the spouses should thoughtfully examine and prayerfully consider concerning the conflicts and issues to be addressed. A commitment to more comprehensive professional counseling or marriage mentoring may be part of the spouses' final understanding. Peace Advocates, however, are not counselors or mentors. The role of the Peace Advocate is to help couples address their conflicts and disputes in a biblically faithful manner.
2. Peace Advocates cannot and do not provide legal advice. Ethical rules prohibit a Peace Advocate from giving legal advice or preparing legally binding documents. This is true even if a Peace Advocate happens to be an attorney. Attorneys are not permitted to participate in RECONCILE. If either spouse feels they need legal advice, they must seek it from an independent attorney outside the RECONCILE process.
3. Coaching and mediation provided through RECONCILE is for the purpose of addressing relational conflict and minor disputes. RECONCILE does not assist spouses with the resolution of legal issues such as divorce, spousal support, child custody, child support, or property division and distribution. If help with these legal issues is needed, RECONCILE will refer the couple to others positioned to assist them with these matters.
4. Each Memorandum of Understanding prepared during mediation is intended to memorialize the understandings reached and the commitments made by the spouses to each other. The Memorandum provides a roadmap and reminders for their marriage in the future. It is not a legally binding agreement or document enforceable in a court of law. If any understandings reached or commitments made need to be incorporated into legally binding documents, the parties must work with an attorney or attorneys of their choice to prepare those documents.

### **Final Conference and Evaluations**

After coaching or mediation, we ask that evaluation forms be completed and returned. These evaluations ask for feedback on RECONCILE services and the Peace Advocate providing those services. The information we obtain from these evaluations is invaluable as we seek to serve married couples in our congregation well. We may also schedule a telephone or video conference with you to discuss the responses we receive or if either spouse requests a conference to discuss their experience or to address any concerns or questions they may have.