

## Faith is Becoming a Hot Topic in Mediation. Are You Ready?

by Leslie Short



I raised the question in a past blog, what is Faith-Based mediation and why is it important? The answer, if faith is important to the parties then it's important the mediation process.

History and present day actions prove that wars, crimes and hatred have stemmed from religion and faith.

When faith-based issues arise are they brushed over with the hope they won't be brought up again? As mediators, are you ready to ask the open ended or direct questions if one or both parties keep bringing up faith? Is it up to the mediator to say I've heard you mention your faith several times is this how you base your decisions? Are you prepared if they say yes?

As mediators we are trained to keep our personal feelings and thoughts out of the conversation. It's different if you focus on faith-based mediation and that's why the parties have come to you. However, when parties come to you for one thing and it turns into something else (mediation) the million dollar question is, if faith is brought up can you stay objective and let it play out?

As I stated in my last faith-based blog, if it's important enough for the topic to keep being raised its important enough to make sure it is addressed for the parties.

The statistics show that faith and health have a connection that's both positive and negative. It's not up to mediators to weigh in but to be prepared to listen with new ears. People are facing crisis directly and indirectly in today's world and the issue of race and faith will take center stage. At some point you may be faced with this hot-topic because using mediation is growing within communities and it is becoming a mainstream option to settle disputes.

What are you doing to be prepared?

To quote Dr. King "Take the first step in Faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase just take the first step." I feel that way about faith being brought up in mediation. Take the step and ask if faith is important if it keeps rising to the top of the discussion. You don't need to understand or be a scholar in religion to empathize with a person and know it's important to their process. The acknowledgement itself may be just what was needed to move on.

Please notice I use the word faith and not religion. Understanding the difference will help guide you in the type of question/s you may need to ask if the session moves in that direction.

As I handle elder/adult family mediations, I often hear from mom or dad how important their church and the church organizations are to them. Then I see the children brush over the importance of what is being said by telling them they will find a new church where they are moving.

When dealing with elders we need to be aware that the organizations they belong to form their community. It's where they participate in activities and socialize with their friends. This community cannot be packed away in boxes or storage because it's time for them to move. It needs to be addressed. Time and time again I am the one that has to slow down the conversation so that the elder can express their feelings about what their faith based community means to them and how it will affect their move.

Listening, observing, discernment and sometimes validation will go a long way when and if the topic of Faith arises in mediation.

It's ok to ask the question, is faith important to you for the outcome of your decision today? Address the question of faith as you would address any other question that arises during a session.

Maybe one-day faith will not be a hot topic? As I write this on MLK day- I have a dream.

Leslie Short biography and additional articles: <http://www.mediate.com/people/personprofile.cfm?auid=1603>

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