



Supreme Court of California

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RONALD M. GEORGE
CHIEF JUSTICE OF CALIFORNIA

April 9, 2008

To the Participants in the Third Annual Collaborative Practice California Conference:

I am pleased to welcome the participants to this annual conference, which provides an opportunity not only to celebrate Collaborative Practice in California, but also to learn more about how best to participate in advancing its effective use. Your commitment to seeking and developing peaceful and equitable solutions for individuals and families undergoing marital dissolution or other civil disputes serves as an important tool in advancing the administration of justice.

With its emphasis on cooperative disclosure and respectful, needs-based negotiation, Collaborative Practice is a promising option for parties seeking an alternative to litigated solutions. Traditional litigation methods in some instances amplify the emotional and financial toll of marital dissolution on families. Collaborative Practice seeks to preserve the relationships needed for the long-term project of parenting and to minimize the drain on family assets that follows protracted litigation.

Marital dissolutions often are not merely legal or economic disputes. Because they arise out of the most intimate relationships, they implicate the basic personal, emotional, and familial needs of parties and their children. Our court system increasingly has recognized that a judicial decree is far from the final word in a divorce; parental and fiscal responsibilities may last for many years. The collaborative approach, which includes attorneys for each party, as well as mental health professionals and neutral financial experts to support the family and guide the parties to mutually acceptable resolutions, can provide parties with complementary resources and dispute resolution methods that are simply unavailable in court.

As Chief Justice, I chair the Judicial Council of California, the constitutional entity charged with oversight of the statewide administration of justice. The importance of providing targeted and effective assistance to families and children in need led

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to the establishment of the Center for Families, Children, and the Courts, as a division of the Council's staff arm, the Administrative Office of the Courts. This award-winning group recently held its annual Family Dispute Resolution Statewide Educational Institute entitled "Sparking Creative Connections: Advancing the Artistry of Family Dispute Resolution." Your work to help families in transition to resolve issues and disputes for themselves plays a crucial role in the efforts by many different partners in the judicial system to find better ways to accomplish a complex, difficult — yet rewarding — task. On behalf of all of us engaged in improving the administration of justice for the people of California, thank you for being here to learn more about ways how to improve your understanding and skills so that you may better serve the families you assist. Thank you for your dedication and commitment. Best wishes for a successful conference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Ronald M. George". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'R' and 'G'.

RONALD M. GEORGE