

Church coalitions in Deep South partner on racial reconciliation

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [December 2, 2020](#) issue



On June 20, 2015, Allen Sanders kneels next to his wife, Georgette, as they pray at a memorial in memory of those killed at Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. (AP Photo / David Goldman)

Leaders of multiracial church coalitions in three southern cities have confessed to being too “comfortable” and have committed anew to “work for justice to right past wrongs” and seek racial unity.

“As a group of racially, ethnically, and politically diverse church leaders in the Deep South areas of Charleston, SC, Montgomery, AL, and Mobile, AL, we recognize and lament how the historic nature of our cities and region contributed to racial oppression and division in our country,” they said in a statement.

“We believe that the good news of Jesus mandates Christians to pursue a reconciliation that is centered on his redemptive work for humanity.”

Kyle Searcy, a Black pastor of a Montgomery church, said the multiracial cadre of organization officials decided to come together to make a statement after the “public killings” of Black people in 2020 deepened racial divides.

“We decided we’re not going to cross the street on the other side and ignore that,” he said, referring to the biblical parable of the good Samaritan.

Ed Litton, a White Southern Baptist minister in Mobile, said that the three groups, each from “notorious slave-

trading cities in the past,” learned about each other and decided to put the statement out together to encourage churches in other cities to take similar actions toward unity.

“We all agree that this a major hindrance to us communicating the gospel in our communities,” he said. “It’s a divided church.”

Asked about the statement’s mention of both reconciliation and justice—where some Christian groups have focused on the former when it comes to racial matters—Litton said that both are part of a Bible-based commitment.

“We know that the Bible profoundly speaks to the issue of justice and it profoundly speaks to the issue of reconciliation,” he said. “And so we see them as inhaling and exhaling. We believe that they’re a part of what it means to be gospel-centric.”

Each of the cities has separate multidenominational initiatives aimed at bridging racial divides. The Montgomery leaders have met for three decades and the Charleston group has met for a decade.

Litton said the Pledge Group started six years ago and has hosted Shrink the Divide events, such as one in 2019 featuring reconciliation advocate John Perkins and Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore. More than 940 people have attended such

an event or participated in a small group or a Bible study.

Litton and David Richey, a Black minister in Mobile, said the meetings over the years have been at times tense and candid, but their faith helps them continue.

“We’ve had some knock-down dragouts and we find our [way] right back to the meeting again and loving the one that you wanted to slap the week before,” said Richey. “It’s because it’s God.”

Charleston mayor John Tecklenburg, whose city witnessed the massacre of nine people at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015, said while some groups use the term *reconciliation*, a city commission that is focused on furthering equity has different terminology.

“We use the word ‘conciliation’ rather than ‘reconciliation’ with the thought that we’re bringing together folks that ain’t never been together before,” he said. “It’s so uplifting, refreshing that other cities in the Deep South are on this journey together.”

Alan Cross, a Southern Baptist minister who lived in Montgomery and pastored there before moving to California in 2019, has been supportive of the groups working together.

“They are demonstrating how Jesus still heals and makes all things new,” he said. —Religion News Service