

ANNIVERSARY FEATURE: Racial Reconciliation and Justice Ministry Team



by Olivia Wakefield | Chair

In 2007-2008 the CBFNC Strategic Plan identified diversity as a focal point for future ministries. In 2007, the CBFNC General Assembly approved the creation of a Diversity Task Force. (Ironically, the initial task force reflected the need to embrace and increase diversity in CBFNC as four Caucasian, relatively young, male pastors formed the original CBFNC Diversity Task Force. Fortunately, the group quickly expanded to include gender, ethnic, and age diversity!)

Early on, the task force decided to focus primarily on ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation, specifically between African-American and Caucasian churches and communities. As a result, the name changed to Racial Reconciliation Ministry Team. More recently, the name has changed to Racial Reconciliation and Justice Ministry Team. Reconciliation cannot occur without first having a relationship to reconcile, and then it must include responding to racial injustice and oppression in our local communities.

Along the way, we have sought God's guidance in how to promote racial justice and reconciliation initiatives as well as increase ethnic diversity in CBFNC churches. We have held regional gatherings, led workshops at our Annual Gathering, created a curriculum, sponsored interns at partner divinity schools throughout North Carolina and attended REI's (Racial Equity Institute) two-day Racial Equity Workshop Phase 1 as a team.

Our current initiative is providing scholarships for CBFNC ministers to attend REI's two-day Racial Equity Workshop



Phase 1 because we felt like it was such a powerful, eye-opening experience for our team members. Personally, I had attended several diversity training and prejudice reduction workshops in the past and was expecting the REI workshop to be similar. Instead, I was surprised by the emphasis on providing a historical context for how racism has been embedded in our nation from the beginning. By the end of the second day, I really was impacted by the power of looking honestly at the past, reflecting on my own ethnicity (and how that impacts who I am and what I value) and thinking about how this information changes how I respond to acts of racial injustice around me. If you are interested in attending this workshop and learning more about a scholarship, please contact Larry Hovis! It will definitely be worth the two-day investment.

We are continually trying to figure out "next steps" and challenging both ourselves as a ministry team and CBFNC churches/members to go beyond surface conversations about ethnicity and racial justice. One of our goals is to empower YOU as a layperson or minister in a local church to be the presence of Christ in your church and community so that healing, justice, and reconciliation can occur in your local context. My journey as an almost-charter member of this team has been and is transformative. My prayer is that your life too will be changed as we all seek ways to bring about racial reconciliation and justice to our communities. 🌈

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Baptist Fellowship congregation will begin meeting Sunday." Mary Apicella, the current pastor says, "One of my favorite quotes from that article, that I believe is still true to who we are: "Providence Baptist Congregation will be a place where people can be open about their faith," Coulter says. She wants those who attend to be willing to open their lives, minds, and hearts to God and see God work in their lives. 'I want us to be able to talk about things that are hard,' she said. 'We might not find the answers but we can still talk about them.'"

At one point in the church's journey, the congregation had difficulty getting a loan for a building. Believing in the work of God at Providence Baptist Church, individuals in the church signed promissory notes at 6% interest and the building was financed!

Starting a church was a lot of work; Intense work! Gail retired in 2008 and was followed by Julie Merritt Lee for seven years. The Sunday afternoon worship meal began during Julie's tenure. Gail recounts, "what's priceless about this church is the Sunday afternoon meal for anyone who wants to come." She says it's been an amazing journey. Things happened that she never expected; things that Gail didn't create or control. Gail declares it was the imagination of the Holy Spirit! Mary Apicella became the church's third pastor on June 11, 2017. The year 2021 will be Providence's 20th anniversary. 🌈

