

**Ant Frederick: “Serve and Build Trust” for Racial Reconciliation**

Antony “Ant” Frederick is used to talking about race related issues. Growing up in Chester, he and his family were the only black members of a white church. The congregation unanimously called Ant’s father as its pastor in the 1990’s and under his leadership became an ethnically diverse church. Even as race relations continue to be at the forefront of national and community debates, Ant says he doesn’t tire of the discussion.

“My experience is different from most. I don’t fatigue from it, maybe because of my background. God has written my story. It’s the way He’s wired me, and I feel like He has set me up to lead in this conversation and in action steps going forward,” says Ant, who currently serves as leader of the CMBA Visionary Leadership Community.

While at the University of South Carolina in 2004, Ant joined a predominately white campus ministry. He says the group recognized the need to reach black students on campus and during his sophomore year Ant launched the new ministry. In 2010 he joined Midtown Fellowship in Columbia, a church with predominately white membership. Ant shared his calling to plant a church targeting impoverished communities with the pastor and, in 2013, became ordained and commissioned to launch Midtown Two Notch, where he currently serves as pastor.

Ant, who is married and has four children, says he has been inundated recently with requests from friends and area church leaders eager to discuss race relations and join forces for change. The discussion is welcomed, and Ant has ideas for how true and lasting change can occur among churches. He also says the time for change is now.

“I have a sense for urgency. I’m not weary of conversation, I’m weary of the injustices I’m seeing. Right now I sense it’s a time to organize, mobilize and to act because, especially among white brothers and sisters, there is an acknowledgement of something needing to be done now more than I have ever seen,” he says.

As he shares his perspective on race, Ant is thoughtful to give definition to his words. In fact, defining language is one of the ideas Ant has for building bridges between black and white churches. To the listener, he uses church history as a starting point.

“I would start by saying the primary issue that’s causing division between churches is that there has been a lack of trust for so many years. The historical actions of the White Church have caused a severe lack of trust between black and white churches. To be specific, as soon as our brothers and sisters before us noticed some of our enslaved Africans were Christians there should have been love and protection for them. In terms of the church and the divide, there was never really unity in the first place,” Ant maintains.

He says the Black Church carries residual hurt from oppression and slavery as it was experienced in clear sight of its white brothers and sisters but who did not intervene. Fear is another critical driver in race relations. Ant says for hundreds of years the narrative has been that black people are “savage” or “barbaric” and that black men, in particular, are dangerous. This generational belief system has created a response that has moved many beyond hatred to violence.

“Lingering racist fear is currently the bigger problem for the black community. If I am speaking to primarily white churches seeking to love our neighbors as ourselves, it is not enough to just condemn racial hatred or not liking someone because of the color of their skin,” Ant says.

He goes on to say that this re-education must include attacking the underlying narrative of fear that has led to police officers, for example, being authorized to kill if they fear for their lives. “There is such a thing as a ‘hate crime,’ but there is no such thing as a ‘fear crime,’” Ant points out. So to truly love black neighbors churches should seek to uncover this dangerous belief, help others to uncover it, condemn it as evil and should include it in discipling church members. Churches, Ant says, can play a vital role in destroying and condemning this narrative and model what it means to truly love its neighbors.

Suppose there is a predominately white church that strongly desires to become more diverse and effectively reach members of the community who are of different ethnicities – what can it do? Ant recommends getting educated. Senior leadership and pastors should become more culturally literate. A church focused on one single culture can’t possibly reach other cultures effectively.

“A lot of white believers have never had to function in a culture that’s not their own. That leads to cultural illiteracy. It makes it difficult to create an environment with expressions of worship that are multicultural, which is what you need if you desire to be culturally diverse. This should involve artistic styles, communication and practices that are hospitable and welcoming to a variety of cultures,” Ant says.

Here is where intentionality comes in – a pastor committed to learning about other cultures should become multicultural themselves, Ant says. They should listen to black preachers, black worship music or watch online services from predominately black churches. They should intentionally shop in black communities, purchase gas or visit a park in a black neighborhood. By doing this Ant says the immersion will soon yield cultural nuances.

“Everyone in a specific culture puts into the culture, contributes to it, receives from it and is affected by that culture. People can actually become multicultural, and every culture brings different strengths to the table. The church leadership’s faith will be greatly enriched when they begin to be impacted and shaped by the expressions of worship from other cultures. When the leaders of the church desire to implement different cultural expressions of worship in the life of their church because they’ve been spiritually blessed and uplifted by it, that’s when progress towards multicultural worship has been made,” Ant explains.

When asked if he could write the story of what he’d like to see happen in the Midlands over the next 12 months in terms of racial reconciliation, including among churches, Ant says a crucial realization needs to occur. The Church is a corporate institution within the community and thereby represents where trust resides. Churches are poised to make an eternal impact in racial reconciliation.

“In the truest, deepest, richest sense reconciliation won’t happen until white churches are more known for building up African American communities than for tearing down African American communities,” Ant says.

Black and white churches should “link arms” for initiatives that uplift, serve and restore. White churches, Ant says, should go under the leadership of black churches in order to bring positive change for an extended period of time after which black pastors can begin to vouch for these churches within the community to begin building stronger bridges and restoration.

“I’d love to see these churches working side by side together. Maybe you have two majority white churches and two majority black churches come together to cultivate health and restoration in an impoverished black neighborhood here in Columbia. Maybe, under the leadership of black churches, they choose to help by focusing on three factors like economic empowerment, education, and mental healthcare. Then they plan to labor together for the good of that neighborhood for years, building trust, and hopefully bringing healing to that neighborhood in the name of Christ Jesus,” Ant says, adding that when a well-resourced, majority white church is willing to serve under a black church's leadership, it builds trust more rapidly. “Serve and build trust. I believe this could become a reproducible model that some of our well-resourced CMBA churches can participate in, and if that were to happen, I believe we will see racial reconciliation at a deeper level than ever before."

Ant is seeing a lot of positive steps being taken as individuals and churches are learning a new language of love in racial reconciliation. He encourages everyone to be willing to engage others of different races and be open to sharing about your own culture, but be even more ready to listen.  
  
“When it comes to issues of race in our country, black people and white people use the same words but speak a different language. We in the CBMA, which is majority white association, have to educate ourselves by learning from black authors, preachers and thinkers so that we can understand exactly what our black brothers and sisters are saying when we talk about issues of race. If we want our conversations to be as effective as possible, we must be intentional not to alienate our black brothers and sisters by forcing them to speak our language and use terms the way we use them during interracial conversations in our CMBA. This will make conversation more productive and helpful,” Ant says.

Several resources for racial reconciliation and understanding are available through the Midtown Fellowship website at [www.midtowncolumbia.com/blog/resources-on-race](http://www.midtowncolumbia.com/blog/resources-on-race). Additional resources, including a recent panel discussion on race relations with Midlands pastors, are available online at [www.columbiametro.org](http://www.columbiametro.org).