

Pastoral Covenant for Racial Reconciliation
(Written from an interview with Ashton Cumberbatch)

Where history is concerned, we have a short rear view mirror. Some of it because we don't like what we see back there, so we don't want to talk about it. Some is that we are ignorant about individuals who have done good work.

One major stride toward reconciliation came about in 1996. There was a group of pastors that got together to deal with the issue of race relations just in the Christian body. It came out of a conversation or request made to Joseph Parker of David Chapel Mission Baptist Church. He was asked by an Anglo pastor whether or not he would sign off on a commitment that he would not provide any weddings for individuals unless they had first gone through marriage counseling. Reverend Parker said, "That's fine, but the issue I have is that the only time I hear from my fellow pastors who are white on the west side is when they want me to join in on one of their issues. Rarely do they come and join in on any of our issues." That led to a group of pastors working together to see what could be done about it. The team consisted of Reverend Gino Hildebrand, who was pastor of North Austin Christian Church at that time, now of Hope Chapel; Reverend Rick Randall, Austin Cornerstone; Reverend Joseph Parker – David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church; Ashton Cumberbatch; and their spouses.

They drafted a covenant for racial reconciliation. It took about a year. It acknowledged that racism is a sin and set out some scriptures that supported that. It said we have fallen short of the glory of God in that area, and it talked about things we could do in our individual congregations and what we could do collectively to combat that. We presented our document to a larger group that existed at the time – Austin Pastors Prayer Fellowship. They thought there was merit, so we had a signing event. I think originally 65 to 70 pastors signed on to that document. Subsequently, pastors even outside the city requested copies of it. But there was some pushback. Some pastors said, "This isn't an area we need to deal with." Some members of congregations said, "You won't be a pastor of mine if you sign off on it." So there were white pastors who lost members. It was a significant event.